

Times in 1999. (How'd you like to cook eggs for her?) In it is a meatloaf recipe that combines beef and veal, pancetta and Parmesan, brightened with lemon zest and white wine. It's a luxurious feed, and I'd run versions through the oven before deciding to take it on the road.

I made one additional change for Ephron. Instead of chopping a fine dice of pancetta as I generally do, I went to the store and asked for thin-sliced pancetta that I would roll and cut into chiffonade at home. Pancetta-studded meatloaf is delicious, of course. But I wanted the bacon really to melt into the meats; I was aiming for an ethereal loaf.

And I was working fast. So it wasn't until the meatloaf came out of the oven that I realized the nice fellow who was manning the meat slicer at my local market was also a dangerous and psychotic meal killer who had not removed the plastic wrap from the pancetta before slicing it into paper-thin rounds. I'd cut these rounds into fine ribbons that had cooked into the meat perfectly, except for the plastic parts, which didn't melt into the meat at all. There was a kind of stubble on my finished loaf — plastic pin bones.

I had two hours until dinner with Ephron. I felt a blaze of panic, the sort that awakens you from that dream in which you're forced to take an exam in a subject you've never studied. I stared at the fuzzy meatloaf for 10 seconds. Then I fed it to the children and started all over again. (It's all right. I gave them each a set of tweezers for the plastic. It was like a game to them.)

Two new meatloaves resulted from this challenge round of cooking. The Gourmet recipe, which I'd come to think of as fancy, was now unlucky, and I thought it wise to have a backup. So in addition to a new, nonplastic version of that, I cooked a huge meatball, drawn from a dish that Mark Ladner used to offer at Lupa, in Greenwich Village, before he went off to be the executive chef at Del Posto: turkey and Italian sausage, cut through with pepper flakes and rosemary, baked in a kind of soffrito. You could make the argument that it's perhaps more beautiful as a dozen meatballs. But it's a marvelous single loaf as well: a fine-textured, surprisingly light dinner that pairs excellently with sautéed greens and the smallest portion of fresh pasta in butter and mint.

With 30 minutes on the clock, I put my meats into serving pans and headed north to the Upper West Side, which is obviously where you'd have dinner with Nora Ephron if such a thing were on the docket.

"This is remarkable," she said in the end, brightly. I went to the hostess's study to enter the words in my notebook. She might just have easily given a small smile and patted me on the arm. That would have been devastating. But I don't believe it was that close. These are both excellent dishes to serve friends, and they make for good leftovers. Add a salad, some decent bread, a lot of red wine. Sometimes New York is the greatest city in the world.

FANCY MEATLOAF

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| ½ loaf Italian bread, crust removed, torn into small pieces (about 2 cups) | 1 bunch parsley, cleaned and finely chopped (about 1 cup) |
| 1 cup whole milk | 2 teaspoons grated lemon zest |
| 1 pound ground beef | Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper |
| 1 pound ground veal | ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil |
| 2 large eggs, scrambled | ¼ cup butter |
| 4 ounces thinly sliced pancetta, chopped | 1 cup dry white wine. |
| ¾ cup grated Parmesan | |

1. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Soak the bread in the milk for 10 minutes.
2. Mix the beef, veal, eggs, pancetta, Parmesan, parsley and lemon zest in a large bowl. Season liberally with salt and pepper. Squeeze the bread to remove excess milk, then chop and add it to the meat. Mix gently until well combined, but do not overmix.

Transfer onto a board and shape into a fine meatloaf, shy of a foot in length and 4 inches across. Loosely cover and refrigerate for 15 minutes.

3. Heat the oil and butter in a large, ovenproof skillet over medium-high heat. Add the meatloaf and sear without moving it until it is browned, about 5 minutes. Carefully slide a spatula under the meatloaf, then gently use another spatula to help turn it and brown the second side, again without moving it for 5 minutes. Transfer to a plate.

4. Pour out all but 2 tablespoons of the fat, return the skillet to the stove and raise the heat to high. Add the wine and deglaze the pan, scraping up the browned bits stuck to it with a wooden spoon. Return the meatloaf to the skillet and then transfer to the oven, basting occasionally with the pan juices, until a meat thermometer inserted into the center of the loaf reads 150 degrees, about 25 minutes.

5. Transfer the meatloaf to a platter and let stand, tented with foil, 10 minutes. Slice, pour the pan juices over the top and serve. Serves 6 to 8. Adapted from Gourmet.



TURKEY MEATLOAF

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| 8 cloves garlic, minced | sausage, casing removed, crumbled |
| 1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh rosemary | ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil |
| Red pepper flakes | 4 ounces bacon, chopped |
| 1 cup fresh bread crumbs of any provenance | 1 medium red onion, finely chopped |
| Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper | 1 28-ounce can whole tomatoes, preferably San Marzano, seeds removed |
| ¼ cup whole milk | 1 cup red wine |
| 1 pound ground turkey | ¼ bunch mint. |
| 1 pound sweet Italian pork | |

1. Preheat the oven to 450 degrees. Combine ⅔ of the garlic, the rosemary, pepper flakes, bread crumbs and liberal amounts of salt and pepper. Add the milk and mix. Add the meats and mix once more to combine; don't overmix. Transfer onto a board and shape into a fine meatloaf, about 9 inches long and 4 inches wide.
2. Place in a baking pan with high sides, drizzle with about 2 tablespoons of olive oil and bake for 25 minutes, turning halfway through to brown evenly. Remove from the oven and reduce the heat to 325 degrees.
3. Meanwhile, fry the bacon in the remaining 2 tablespoons of oil until it starts to curl and its fat is rendered. Add the onions and remaining garlic, cooking until the onions are translucent, about 4 minutes. Add the tomatoes and wine and bring to a boil.
4. Return the meatloaf to the pan, pour the sauce over the top, cover tightly with foil and bake until a meat thermometer inserted at the center reads 150 degrees, 20 to 30 minutes.
5. Transfer the meatloaf to a platter and let stand, tented with foil, for 10 minutes. Cut into thick slices, spoon tomato sauce over the top and scatter with torn mint leaves. Serves 6 to 8. Adapted from Mark Ladner. ♦