

Sautéed Spinach with Pine Nuts and Golden Raisins

SERVES 4-6

People go nuts over our spinach, and I think it has a lot to do with all its layers of flavor. I've always known I wanted spinach on Toro Bravo's menu. Spinach was one of my favorite vegetables, growing up. I even liked crappy canned spinach because I had a Popeye obsession. Spinach, raisins, and pine nuts is a traditional dish you find in Spain's Catalan region, but in Spain it's often done using less-than-fresh spinach. We use the freshest spinach we can find, and raisins we reconstitute in Basque cider (shout-out to Ryan Bleibtrey for thinking that up) that gives the spinach that funky, yeasty thing that I love. We finish it with a drizzle of mugolio, which Alex, my sales rep from Provvista Specialty Foods, introduced me to. I'd never heard of mugolio before. It's a pinecone bud syrup that's a little pricey—\$25 for a 3.6 ounce bottle—that tastes like piney maple syrup. It's the magic in this dish. You could omit it, of course, but it's not going to be the same.

1. Put a medium sauté pan over medium-high heat and cook the raisins and cider for about 10 minutes, until the cider evaporates. Remove from heat.
2. Heat 2 large sauté pans over medium heat with half of the olive oil and butter in each. Let them bubble and just start to brown before adding the garlic in equal parts to each pan. You don't want to get any color on the garlic. Cook the garlic for about 1 minute, until you just start to smell it.

3. Add the spinach in equal parts to the pans, then add the salt and pepper. You know you're doing it right when you hear the spinach crackle from the heat when you add it. If you only use one sauté pan, make sure it is very large; otherwise your spinach will drown in its juices and get mushy.
4. Use tongs to move the spinach every 20 seconds or so until it is finished cooking—after about 2 minutes—and just slightly wilted.

5. Turn off the heat and add the toasted pine nuts, reconstituted and cooked raisins, and lemon juice and let the residual heat of the pan finish cooking the spinach.
6. Tong the spinach into a sieve to drain off the remaining water and fat. Spoon the spinach onto your serving dish and drizzle the mugolio over the top.

1/4 cup white raisins
1/4 cup Basque cider (or other good, dry, local cider)
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 tablespoon butter
5 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
1 pound spinach, trimmed and rinsed
Salt and pepper
1/4 cup pine nuts, toasted
1/8 lemon, juiced
2 teaspoons mugolio (You can order this online. It'll set you back \$25 for one small jar. Once we've used all of the mugolio, we use the cute little jars as cream pitchers at Tasty n Sons.)