



Snack-y Asparagus Plate with Preserved-Lemon Aioli

By Susan Spungen
Serves 4-6

I love the salty-tangy flavor that comes from the preserved lemon paste — a can't-live-without pantry staple for me — but you can still make this classic creamy sauce without it. Just substitute 4 teaspoons of fresh lemon juice for the paste. You can also include some extra-virgin olive oil in the total amount of oil, but not too much or it can make the aioli bitter. Use a little water at the end to thin the sauce if needed so it's smooth and loose enough to easily drag an asparagus spear through it.

For the aioli:

- 2 cloves garlic, roughly chopped
- 2 large egg yolks
- 2 teaspoons water
- 1½ tablespoons preserved lemon paste (or finely chopped preserved lemons)
- ¾ cup neutral oil, like peanut or safflower

For the fried lemons and almonds:

- ½ cup vegetable oil (for frying)
- 1 large (preferably seedless) lemon, well-scrubbed and thinly sliced
- 1 cup whole raw almonds
- Kosher salt

For the asparagus:

- 1 large bunch thick asparagus (about 1 pound), tough bottoms snapped off
- 2 to 3 teaspoons olive oil
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
- Flaky sea salt

-
1. To make the aioli: combine the garlic, egg yolks, water, and lemon paste in the work bowl of a mini food processor, and whizz until smooth.
 2. With the machine running, dribble in a drop or two of oil (use the perforated lid of the food processor to do this), then a drop or two more.
 3. Keep adding oil very, very, slowly at first and then working up to a steady stream until all

the oil has been added. Scrape the sides to make sure there aren't any puddles of oil and pulse briefly to incorporate.

4. Scrape into a bowl and refrigerate until needed.
5. Make the lemons and the walnuts: Bring a saucepan of water to a boil and drop in the lemon slices. Simmer for 2 minutes and scoop out onto a paper towel. Pat the top with another towel so they're as dry as possible.
6. Heat the oil in a medium skillet over medium heat until hot (if you dip the edge of a lemon in it, it should sizzle), and then add them to the oil, one at a time, angling each slice away from you so it doesn't splash.
7. Fry for 1 to 2 minutes per side, until thoroughly golden brown, and transfer using tongs or tweezers to a paper towel-lined plate. Sprinkle with salt.
8. Add the almonds to the oil and fry for 5 to 7 minutes, stirring gently, until a shade or two darker and starting to split. Watch them carefully, as the cooking time can vary a lot depending on how hot the oil is.
9. Transfer to another paper towel using a slotted spoon, and sprinkle with salt while hot. Let cool completely.
10. Make the asparagus: Coat the spears with oil, using only as much as you need, and sprinkle lightly with salt and pepper. Heat a gas grill to high, and preheat a grill platter inside if you have one. If roasting, heat oven to 500°F with a baking sheet inside on the middle rack. Cook the asparagus until lightly charred but still bright green, 2 to 3 minutes per side on the grill or 6 to 7 minutes per side in the oven.
11. Arrange everything on a big platter and sprinkle with flaky sea salt. Serve at room temperature.