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SEASONAL SOIRÉE

Serve Up the Taste of the Mediterranean

Celebrate the final stretch of the season with fresh flavours and effortless hosting

BY SEBASTIEN AND SHEILA CENTNER **PUBLISHED** AUGUST 14, 2026



AS WE EDGE CLOSER TO THE END OF OUR CANADIAN SUMMER, there's something special about making the most of the season while it lasts. August invites us to slow the pace just a little more, gather around the table a little longer, and savour simple meals shared with good company before the hustle and bustle of the fall months arrive. Whether it's a relaxed lunch on the patio, an impromptu aperitivo with friends, or an evening dinner that stretches well past sunset, the best moments are often the ones that feel the least rushed.

We've been writing about Mediterranean entertaining for years. It speaks to us about that relaxed "rush-free" dining, along with letting quality ingredients shine without the need to over-spice or over-prepare. Fresh vibrant dishes full of flavour and designed to be shared create an atmosphere that feels effortless but still elegant. The beauty is in the balance – thoughtful preparation without overcomplicating the experience.

This month's recipes capture our philosophy beautifully. Begin with a classic Frozen Aperol Spritz, follow with chilled gazpacho featuring summer tomatoes, then enjoy a seared beef tenderloin over a simple arugula salad, and finish with one of our favourite summer desserts … Italian affogato.

SEB SAYS: *I always try to include a mix of temperatures and textures for my summer meals – a chilled starter, a warm main and a frozen dessert create a meal that feels balanced.*

THE COCKTAIL

NO MEDITERRANEAN GATHERINGS FEEL COMPLETE without an aperitivo moment. This frozen twist on a classic Italian favourite brings a refreshing start to the table – bright, citrusy and made for slow summer evenings.



Frozen Aperol Spritz

YIELD: 2 cocktails | **PREP TIME:** 10 minutes

Ingredients:

6 oz Aperol

2 oz prosecco

2 oz club soda

½ orange juice

2 cups ice

Orange or clementine slices for garnish

- Add the Aperol, prosecco, orange juice and ice to a blender.
- Blend until smooth and slushy.
- Divide between two glasses, top each with a splash of club soda, and garnish with an orange or clementine slice.
- Serve immediately.

SHEILA SAYS: *A signature cocktail is an easy way to make guests feel welcome from the moment they arrive. It adds a thoughtful touch to your gathering but keep the recipe simple so you're not "bartending" all night.*

THE STARTER

WITH THE SEASON'S BEST PRODUCE AT ITS PEAK, August is the perfect time to let peak-season produce take centre stage. This chilled Spanish classic captures everything we love about summer – vibrant flavours, simplicity and a dish that's meant to be enjoyed slowly.



Gazpacho

YIELD: 6-8 servings | **PREP TIME:** 20 minutes + 1 hour to overnight to chill

Ingredients:

2 lb ripe on-the-vine tomatoes or beefsteak tomatoes (about 8–10; see note)
3 garlic cloves
3 peperoncino rings (1 whole peperoncino)
2 red bell peppers, roughly chopped
1 English cucumber, peeled, seeds and pulp removed
½ Spanish onion, roughly chopped
½ cup olive oil
3 Tbsp red wine vinegar
1½ tsp honey
1 Tbsp sea salt
½ Tbsp black pepper
6 tsp mascarpone cheese

Method:

• Put all the ingredients except the mascarpone in a blender or food processor, and blend on high speed until completely smooth.
• Depending on the size of your blender, you may need to do this in batches.
• Let the gazpacho sit in the refrigerator for at least 1 hour, or up to overnight.
• Taste and season with more salt, pepper, or honey if necessary.
• To serve, ladle the soup into individual bowls, and top each one with 1 tsp of mascarpone.

Note: Gazpacho works best with the ripest summer tomatoes. Purchase your tomatoes a few days in advance and let them ripen on the counter. Place them stem side down on a sunny windowsill or next to other fruits like bananas or apples.

SEB SAYS: *Always try to use local seasonal products when possible. This time of year there are so many options and for a recipe like the gazpacho, the local fresh tomatoes are the key to the dish being so flavourful.*

THE MAIN

FOR THE MAIN COURSE, Mediterranean entertaining takes a relaxed approach to a classic centrepiece. This seared beef tenderloin is simple yet impressive, pairing beautifully with bright arugula, citrus, and parmesan flavours.



Seared Beef Steak with Arugula Salad

YIELD: 6-8 servings | **PREP TIME:** 20 minutes + 1 hour 10 minutes to rest | **COOK TIME:** 4-6 minutes

Ingredients:

Beef:

1 (2–3 lb) beef tenderloin
2 Tbsp olive oil
2 Tbsp salt
2 Tbsp black pepper

Salad:

5 cups arugula
2 Tbsp lemon juice
1 Tbsp olive oil
½ tsp salt
½ tsp black pepper
2 lemons, cut into slices, then quartered
6 Tbsp grated parmigiano-reggiano

Method:

Beef:

• Remove the beef from the fridge, pat dry, and let sit at room temperature for 1 hour.
• Rub all sides of the beef with the oil and season with the salt and pepper.
• Heat a large cast iron skillet over high heat. When it's very hot, add the meat and cook for 2 minutes, undisturbed.
• Flip and cook for another 2 minutes, undisturbed, so you get a good crust and medium-rare inside.
• Adjust the time and add 1 more minute to each side if you want the meat medium instead of medium-rare.
• Transfer to a wire rack and let rest for at least 10 minutes so the juices redistribute. The meat only needs to be warm or room temperature when you serve it.
• Transfer to a cutting board and cut into thin slices.

Salad:

- In a medium bowl, toss the arugula with the lemon juice, oil, salt, and pepper.
- In the centre of a large round platter, pile up the arugula.
- Arrange the beef slices around the salad.
- Garnish with the lemons and parmigiano-reggiano.

SEB SAYS: *Don't skip the resting time – it's what keeps the steak tender and juicy. It's a small step that makes a big difference when you're serving guests.*

THE DESSERT

ENDING A SUMMER MEAL ON A SWEET NOTE can be as simple as this Italian classic. Rich espresso, creamy ice cream and a little crunch come together for a dessert that's effortless yet memorable.



Affogato

YIELD: 6 servings | **PREP TIME:** 10 minutes + 1 hour to chill

Ingredients:

1 pint vanilla ice cream

1 cup + 2 tbsp espresso or strongly brewed coffee

12 amaretti cookies, crushed

Method:

• Chill six espresso cups or small glasses in the fridge for 1 hour.

• Place 1 scoop of vanilla ice cream in each glass and immediately pour over 1 shot of espresso or 2-3 Tbsp of strongly brewed coffee.

• Garnish with crushed amaretti cookies and serve immediately.

Note: If you don't have espresso to use in your affogato, strongly brewed coffee is a great substitute. Don't be afraid to use instant coffee either in this recipe. To keep the ice cream from completely melting, allow the espresso to cool a bit before serving. For the biscotti, most contain nuts – to err on the safe side, you can swap out with crumbling a nut-free cookie instead.

SEB SAYS: *The magic of an affogato comes from the contrast – hot coffee, cold ice cream and a little crunch from the biscotti. Simple combinations often create the most memorable bites.*

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Great entertaining is about creating moments that feel thoughtful, welcoming and memorable. As the end of summer is on the horizon, embrace the simple pleasures of the season: a beautifully set table, fresh flavours and meaningful conversations with great friends and family shared over a memorable meal.



Seb and Sheila Centner

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