

Angel Hair Pasta with Scallops and Arugula

Fine Italian capers come from Pantelleria and Salina, two small Sicilian islands. They are packed in salt and have a sweet, floral fragrance, nothing like sharp-tasting brine-packed varieties. Luckily, Sicilian capers are becoming easier to find. Ask for them at Italian specialty-food stores, where they are usually sold in large plastic bags. To prepare salted capers, soak them in cool water for about 15 minutes, changing the water once or twice, to remove excess salt. Give them a final rinse and drain well.

Ingredients:

1 1/2 lb. large sea scallops, side muscle removed
Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste
1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
Grated zest of 1 lemon
Leaves from 2 or 3 large fresh thyme sprigs, minced
4 Tbs. (1/2 stick) unsalted butter
5 shallots, minced
1 lb. angel hair pasta
Juice of 1 lemon
1 cup chicken stock
1/4 cup capers, preferably salt-packed, rinsed and drained
1/2 cup pine nuts, lightly toasted
1 large bunch arugula, preferably small leaved, stems removed

Directions:

Rinse the scallops and dry well with paper towels. Season the scallops with salt and pepper. In a large, heavy fry pan over high heat, warm the olive oil until it shimmers. In batches without crowding, add the scallops and sear until nicely browned on one side, about 2 minutes. Turn the scallops over and brown the other side, about 1 minute more. Return all the scallops to the pan, add the lemon zest and thyme, and cook for a moment. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the scallops to a bowl. Reduce the heat to low and add the butter and shallots to the pan. Sauté until softened, about 4 minutes.

Meanwhile, bring a large pot of water to a boil over high heat. Generously salt the boiling water, add the pasta and cook until al dente (tender but firm to the bite), 3 to 4 minutes.

While the pasta is cooking, add the lemon juice and stock to the fry pan and deglaze the pan, stirring to scrape up the browned bits from the bottom. Simmer until slightly thickened, 3 to 4 minutes. Drain the pasta well and add it to the fry pan. Add the scallops and any juices that have accumulated, then add the capers and pine nuts. Toss over low heat to finish cooking the scallops and mix the ingredients, about 1 minute. Taste and adjust the seasonings.