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Slow-Roasted Filet of Beef with Basil Parmesan Mayonnaise

Serves 6 to 8

I had always cooked filet of beef at a high temperature to sear the outside and keep the inside moist and rare. Recently, though, I tried slow-roasting a filet of beef, and found it was the tenderest I'd ever tasted. Prep it in advance and throw it in the oven two hours before dinner. The homemade mayonnaise with basil and Parmesan is a delicious accompaniment.

1 whole filet of beef tenderloin, trimmed and tied (4-1/2 pounds)
3 tablespoons good olive oil
4 teaspoons kosher salt
2 teaspoons coarsely ground black pepper
10 to 15 branches fresh tarragon
Basil Parmesan Mayonnaise, for serving (recipe follows)

Preheat the oven to 275 degrees. Use an oven thermometer to be sure your oven temperature is accurate!

Place the filet on a sheet pan and pat it dry with paper towels. Brush the filet all over with the oil, reserving about half a tablespoon. Sprinkle it all over with the salt and pepper (it will seem like a lot but believe me, it makes a difference). Place the tarragon branches around the beef, tying them in 4 or 5 places with kitchen string to keep them in place, and then brush the tarragon with the reserved oil.

Roast the filet of beef for 1-1/4 to 1-1/2 hours, until the temperature registers 125 degrees in the center for rare and 135 degrees for medium-rare. I place the thermometer horizontally through the end of the beef. Cover the filet with aluminum foil and allow to rest for 20 minutes. Slice thickly and serve warm or at room temperature with Basil Parmesan Mayonnaise.

Basil Parmesan Mayonnaise – Makes about 2 cups

Homemade mayonnaise sounds intimidating but there's really only one trick: the eggs and oil must be totally at room temperature. Adding fresh basil leaves and salty Parmesan cheese makes this a great sauce for filet of beef but it's also delicious as sandwich spread, a dip for crudités, or served with a flavorful fish like salmon or swordfish.

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2 extra large egg yolks, at room temperature
3 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese (*see note)
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
1/2 cup chopped fresh basil leaves, lightly packed
1/2 teaspoon minced garlic
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
1 cup vegetable oil, at room temperature
1/2 cup good olive oil, at room temperature

Place the egg yolks, lemon juice, Parmesan, mustard, basil, garlic, 1 tablespoon salt, and 1 teaspoon pepper in a food processor fitted with the steel blade. Process for 20 seconds, until smooth. Combine the vegetable oil and olive oil in a 2-cup liquid measuring cup. With the processor running, slowly pour the oil mixture through the feed tube to make a thick emulsion. Taste for seasonings – the mayonnaise is a sauce so it should be highly seasoned. Store in the refrigerator until ready to use; it will keep for up to a week.

* Note: I “grate” the Parmesan in the food processor – it’s actually ground, which is better than grated.