

## Fennel-Sausage Gravy

### Ingredients

1 medium fennel bulb with fronds  
 1 tablespoon pure olive oil  
 Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper  
 1 tablespoon canola oil  
 8 ounces (1 cup) bulk Italian chicken sausage  
 3 tablespoons unsalted butter  
 1/2 teaspoon whole fennel seeds, finely ground  
 1/4 teaspoon dry mustard powder  
 1/4 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg  
 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper  
 3 tablespoons unbleached all-purpose flour  
 2 cups whole milk  
 1 1/2 cups heavy cream

### Preparation

Makes 4 Servings

1. Position a rack in the center of the oven and preheat to 375°F. Line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper and set aside.
  2. Trim, halve and core the fennel bulb. Chop enough fronds to measure 2 teaspoons and set aside. Placing the halves cut side down on a cutting board, slice them vertically, then slice in the opposite direction, creating a 1/2-inch dice.
  3. Toss the diced fennel with the olive oil, season to taste with salt and pepper, and transfer to the prepared baking sheet, spreading the pieces so they roast evenly. Bake for 15 minutes, or until the fennel is golden brown on the edges. Set aside to cool.
  4. Place a large sauté pan over medium heat. Add the canola oil, coating the bottom of the pan. After about 1 minute when the pan is quite hot, add the sausage. Using a spoon, break the sausage into small pieces, tossing to cook thoroughly. When the sausage is completely cooked (about 4 minutes), pour it into a strainer fitted over a medium bowl to catch the rendered fat. (Often with chicken sausage there is little or no excess fat, but with pork varieties you may see more. You can substitute the rendered sausage fat for the butter called for in this recipe, if you like.) Set aside.
  5. Return the sauté pan to medium heat. Add the butter and melt completely. Add the fennel seed, mustard powder, nutmeg, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and cayenne pepper. Sprinkle in the flour and, using a whisk, combine the dry ingredients with the fat to create a roux (cooked flour and fat that will thicken into the gravy). Cook for 1 to 2 minutes, whisking, until the roux is a deep golden color. Reduce the heat to low and add the milk in a slow stream. Whisk the milk into the roux as you go, combining it completely (almost making a paste) before adding more milk - if you add the milk too quickly, you'll end up with those dreaded lumps! Add the heavy cream and reserved fennel and sausage. Cook for 20 to 25 minutes - you want to cook out the raw flour taste and all the gravy to thicken. Check the seasoning, adding additional salt and pepper to taste.
  6. Ladle 3/4 cup gravy over toasted bread and poached eggs. Garnish with a sprinkle of parsley and reserved fennel fronds.
- If you don't use all of the gravy, it freezes well for up to 2 weeks. To reheat, warm it in a sauce pan over medium heat with a bit more cream or milk, stirring until smooth.