

The holiday season is upon us. Over the next few weeks, we will be providing you with recipes for your upcoming gatherings. Let us know if there is something you would like us to put in our column, or if you have a recipe to share, please submit to ads@thedrummer.com.

Santa Claus Cranberry Punch

Level: Easy
Total: 40 min
Active: 40 min
Yield: 4 drinks

6 cups lemon-lime soda (48 oz.)
2 c. cranberry juice (16 oz.)
1 lime, quartered
Whipped cream, for topping
4 maraschino cherries
Confectioners' sugar, for sprinkling, opt.

Pour 1-1/2 cups of the lemon-lime soda and 1/2 cup of the cranberry juice into each glass, then squeeze the juice from a lime quarter into each. Mound whipped cream on top of each drink and add a cherry. Insert a straw and sprinkle with confectioners' sugar snow if desired.

Cranberry Brie Bites

Level: Easy
Total: 55 min
Active: 35 min
Yield: 10 to 12 servings

1 lg. egg
1 (8 oz.) wheel Brie
1 (17.25 oz. pkg. frozen puff pastry (2 sheets), thawed
All-purpose flour, for dusting
1/3 c. whole-berry cranberry sauce
1/4 c. walnuts, finely chopped
1 T. fresh thyme leaves

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees F and line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper.

Whisk together the egg with 1 tablespoon of water in a small bowl for an egg wash. Cut the side rind off the Brie, then cut the Brie into 32 even pieces. Set aside.

Unfold a puff pastry sheet on a lightly floured surface. Roll out into a 13-inch square. Cut into 16 squares. Repeat with the second sheet so you have 32 squares total.

Top a pastry square with about 1/2 teaspoon cranberry sauce, 1/4 teaspoon walnuts, a piece of Brie and a pinch of thyme.

Use your finger or a pastry brush to brush the edges of the pastry square with egg wash until lightly coated and tacky. Pinch 2 opposite points together, then pinch the remaining 2 points together so that you have a little package. Repeat with the remaining pastry squares and filling.

Transfer the pouches to the prepared baking sheets and brush with the remaining egg wash. Bake until puffed and golden brown, 15 to 20 minutes.

Pomegranate Short Ribs

Prep Time: 25 min. + chilling
Cook Time: 6 hrs.
Yield: 8 servings

1 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. ground cinnamon
1/2 tsp. pepper
1/4 tsp. ground coriander
Dash crushed red pepper flakes
8 bone-in beef short ribs (about 4 lbs.)
2 T. safflower oil
1 med. onion, chopped
3 garlic cloves, minced
1 T. tomato paste
1-1/2 c. chicken or beef stock
1-1/2 c. dry red wine or pomegranate juice
3 T. soy sauce, opt.
1/3 c. pomegranate molasses
Minced fresh parsley & pomegranate seeds

Combine the first 5 ingredients; rub over ribs. Refrigerate, covered, at least 2 hours. In a large skillet, heat oil over medium heat. Brown ribs on all sides in batches. Transfer to a 5-qt. slow cooker. Discard drippings, reserving 2 tablespoons. Add onion to drippings; cook and stir over medium-high heat until tender, 8-10 minutes. Add garlic and tomato paste; cook 1 minute longer.

Add wine to pan; increase heat to medium-high. Cook 10 minutes until slightly thickened, stirring to loosen browned bits from pan. Transfer to slow cooker. Add stock, molasses and, if desired, soy sauce, making sure ribs are fully submerged in liquid. Cook, covered, on low 6-8 hours, until ribs are tender. Serve ribs with parsley and pomegranate seeds.

Curried Acorn Squash Soup

Prep Time: 50 min.

Cook Time: 20 min.

Yield: 6 servings

3 med. acorn squash, halved & seeded
1/2 c. chopped onion
3 to 4 tsp. curry powder
2 T. butter
3 c. chicken broth
1 c. half-and-half cream
1/2 tsp. ground nutmeg
Salt & pepper to taste
Crumbled cooked bacon, opt.

Place squash, cut side down, in a greased shallow baking pan. Bake at 350° for 35-40 minutes or until the squash is almost tender.

In a large saucepan, saute onion and curry powder in butter until onion is tender. Remove from the heat; set aside. Carefully scoop out squash; add pulp to saucepan. Gradually add broth. Cook over medium heat for 15-20 minutes or until squash is very tender. Cool slightly.

In a food processor, process the squash mixture until smooth; return to saucepan. Stir in the cream, nutmeg, salt and pepper. Cook over low heat until heated through (do not boil). Garnish with bacon if desired.

Glazed Brussels Sprouts and Potatoes

Level: Easy

Total: 45 min

Prep: 20 min

Cook: 25 min

Yield: 8 servings

Kosher salt
2 lbs. baby red-skinned potatoes
2 red onions, cut into 1" wedges
2 lbs. sm. Brussels sprouts, trimmed, tough outer leaves removed
1 stick unsalted butter
1 T. chopped fresh thyme
1 T. white wine vinegar
1 T. honey
Freshly ground pepper
1/4 c. chopped fresh parsley

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add the potatoes and cook until tender, about 15 minutes, adding the red onions during the last 4 minutes of cooking. Remove with a slotted spoon; blot dry with paper towels.

Prepare a large bowl of ice water. Return the pot of water to a boil; add the Brussels sprouts and cook until tender, 6 to 7 minutes. Drain and immediately transfer to the ice water. Stir a few times until cooled, then drain the Brussels sprouts; blot dry with paper towels. (The vegetables can be prepared to this point up to 2 hours ahead; cover and refrigerate.)

Melt the butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the thyme, vinegar and honey and bring to a simmer. Add the vegetables and toss until glazed and heated through, about 3 minutes, adding a few tablespoons of water if necessary. Season with salt and pepper and toss with the parsley.

Ultimate Winter Salad

Yield: 4 servings

Prep Time: 20 min

Total Time: 20 min

For The Salad:

6 oz. weight shredded kale
1/2 sm. lemon, juiced
1 T. extra virgin olive oil
6 oz. weight shredded vegetables, such as brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots
2 med. apples, cored & diced
1-1/2 c. candied pecans (see note)
4 oz. weight crumbled goat cheese
1-1/2 c. roasted butternut squash (see note)
1/2 c. pomegranate arils

For The Dressing:

1/2 c. red wine vinegar
4 tsp. whole grain or Dijon mustard
4 tsp. pure maple syrup
1/4 tsp. sea salt
1/4 tsp. ground black pepper
1/2 c. extra virgin olive oil

Put the shredded kale in a very large salad bowl. Add lemon juice and extra-virgin olive oil. Use your hands to massage the lemon juice and olive oil into the greens, about a minute or so. The greens should wilt slightly and take on a deep green color.

Add the other shredded vegetables/greens to the bowl as well as the chopped apple and pecans.

Make the dressing by combining all of the dressing ingredients in a lidded glass jar or canning jar. Shake vigorously for 30 seconds and then pour it over the salad. Mix well.

Add the crumbled goat cheese, butternut squash, and pomegranate arils on top. Serve.

Notes:

•To make the candied pecans, put the pecans in a small skillet with 1 tablespoon pure maple syrup and 1 tablespoon whole grain mustard. Cook on medium-low heat until nuts are toasted and sticky, 5-6 minutes. There shouldn't be any liquid left in the pan. Add a pinch of salt and remove from the pan to cool before adding them to the salad.

•To make roasted butternut squash, put the squash on a small baking sheet. Toss with 1 tablespoon of avocado oil and a pinch or two of sea salt. Roast at 425°F until browned and soft, about 15–20 minutes.

No-Bake Chocolate Mocha Yule Log

Level: Intermediate

Total: 5 hr 30 min (includes chilling and setting times)

Active: 1 hr

Yield: 6 to 8 servings

3 c. heavy cream
1/3 c. confectioners' sugar, plus more for decorating
2 T. instant espresso powder
40 chocolate wafer cookies, such as Nabisco Chocolate Wafers
12 oz. semisweet chocolate, chopped
Fresh mint leaves, for decorating
Fresh rosemary sprigs, for decorating
Fresh cranberries, for decorating
7 white store-bought meringues, for decorating
6 marshmallows, for decorating
Cocoa powder, for dusting

Whip together 1-1/2 cups of the heavy cream, the confectioners' sugar and espresso powder in a large bowl with an electric mixer on medium-high speed until stiff peaks form, 2 to 3 minutes.

Spread a heaping tablespoon of the whipped cream onto one side of 39 chocolate wafer cookies (wipe the spoon clean with a rubber spatula between dollops). Spread the whipped cream out on the cookies with a small offset spatula. Stack 5 cookies on top of each other. Repeat with the remaining cookies (including the one without whipped cream) so that you have 8 stacks total. One of the stacks will have a cookie on top with no whipped cream; this stack will be the top stack.

To build the log: Lay out a piece of plastic wrap about 20 inches long on the countertop. Working across the entire length of the plastic wrap, lay one of the cookie stacks on its side. Gently press the remaining 7 cookies stacks together, end to end, finishing with the top stack, to make one long cookie log that's about 15 to 18 inches long. Wrap the log up in the plastic wrap and chill for at least 4 hours and up to overnight.

While your stack is chilling, make the ganache: Put the chocolate in a medium bowl. Bring the remaining 1 1/2 cups heavy cream to a boil in a small saucepan and pour over the chocolate. Let sit for 10 minutes, then stir until completely melt. Pour the mixture into the bowl of an electric mixer and refrigerate until completely cool, about 30 minutes. Just before frosting, whip the ganache until it just begins to loosen up, turns lighter in color and is spreadable, 30 to 45 seconds. It's important not to overwhip or it will become grainy.

Cut a 2- to 3- inch diagonal piece from the top end of the log and place it on top of the log at an angle; this will be the branch. Spread the ganache over the log to cover it completely. Heat a metal fork. Use the tines and the back of the fork to draw a bark pattern in the ganache, running it along the surface in short strokes.

To make the mushrooms: Shave the tops of 6 of the meringues with a rasp grater until they are smooth and round and resemble mushroom caps. Smooth the tops with a wet finger. Mix together 2 tablespoons confectioners' sugar with 1/4 teaspoon water in a small bowl to make a glue. Smear a little of the sugar glue on the bottom of each meringue and stick a marshmallow to it to make a stem. To make a shorter stem, simply cut the marshmallow in half with kitchen shears. Let the mushrooms sit for 30 minutes until the sugar water has hardened. Dust the tops with cocoa powder.

Decorate the cake with the mushrooms, rosemary, mint and cranberries. Shave the remaining meringue over top of the cake to make snow. Slice the cake on a diagonal for serving.

Homemade Cannoli

Level: Intermediate

Total: 1 hr 30 min

Prep: 45 min

Inactive: 30 min

Cook: 15 min

Yield: 24 cannoli

Shells:

2 c. all-purpose flour
1 T. granulated sugar
1/4 tsp. kosher salt
1 T. plus 2 tsp. unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
1 egg yolk
1/2 c. dry white wine

Filling:

2 c. ricotta cheese, preferably whole milk
3/4 c. powdered sugar
1 tsp. ground cinnamon
1/4 tsp. allspice
1/4 c. heavy cream
1/4 c. small semisweet chocolate chips
1 lemon
1 quart canola oil, for frying
Flour, for rolling
1 egg, lightly beaten, for egg wash
Powdered sugar, for dusting

For the shell dough: In a medium bowl, sift together the flour, sugar and salt. Work the butter pieces into the flour with your fingers until the mixture becomes coarse and sandy. Add the egg yolk and the white wine and mix until it becomes a smooth dough. Spread a piece of plastic wrap on a flat surface and place the dough in the center. Wrap the plastic loosely around it and press the dough to fill the gap. Flattening the dough will mean less rolling later. Let it rest in the fridge for a few minutes while you make the filling.

For the filling: In a medium bowl, whisk the ricotta until smooth. Sift in the powdered sugar, cinnamon and allspice. Mix to blend. In a separate bowl (or in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the whisk attachment), beat the heavy cream until fairly stiff. Using a rubber spatula, gently fold the cream into the ricotta mixture. Stir in the chocolate chips. Lightly zest the exterior of the lemon and stir it into the ricotta. Refrigerate for a half hour to an hour.

To roll and fry the shells: In a medium pot with a heavy bottom, heat the canola oil to 360 degrees F. Meanwhile, sift an even layer of flour on a flat surface. Flour a rolling pin. Roll the dough until it is very thin (about 1/8-inch thick). Cut the dough into fourths and work in small batches. Use any glass or small bowl that has a 3-to-4-inch diameter. Cut rounds, tracing around each one to assure the dough has been fully cut. You should have about 24 circles. Wrap each circle around a cannoli mold. Use a little of the egg wash on the edge of each round to seal it shut and to assure it won't slide or fall off the mold before pressing it closed over the mold. Flare the edges out slightly from the mold. Flaring will allow the oil to penetrate each cannoli shell as they fry. Use a pair of tongs to hold the edge of the mold as you submerge and fry the shell in the oil until crispy, 2 to 3 minutes. Remove from the oil and holding the mold in one hand with your tongs, gently grip the shell in your other hand with a kitchen towel and carefully slide it off the mold. Set aside to cool. Repeat with all of the circles.

To fill the cannolis: Just before serving, use a pastry bag without a tip to pipe the ricotta into the cannoli molds. Fill the cannoli shells from both ends so the cream runs through the whole shell. Dust with powdered sugar. Powdered sugar gives that little extra sweetness and added texture to the exterior. It also makes me feel like I have a professional bakery touch in my own home. Serve immediately.

Cook's Note: If the ricotta has an excess of liquid, drain it over a strainer for at least a half an hour before making the filling. Make and fry the shells and the filling. Don't fill the shells with the cream until you are ready to eat them. Everyone loves a crispy cannoli.

Quote of the Week:

"My father volunteered in early 1941, before Pearl Harbor, and became an officer in the U.S. Navy. As I was growing up, he taught me the responsibility of command: A leader is ultimately responsible for every aspect of the welfare of people under his or her care. That was a deeply felt obligation in his generation."

~Chesley Sullenberger