

'Tis the season for entertaining!

At this time of year, we are all planning for different kinds of festive gatherings.

This week we will look at some great appetizers and bring-along foods for a group (or stay at home) event!

Wishing You a Very Merry Christmas and a Healthy New Year!

Puff Pastry Danishes

Prep: 30 min.

Cook: 15 min.

Servings: 1-1/2 doz.

1 pkg. (8 oz.) cream cheese, softened
1/4 C. sugar
2 T. all-purpose flour
1/2 tsp. vanilla extract
2 lg. egg yolks, room temperature
1 T. water
1 pkg. (17.3 oz.) frozen puff pastry, thawed
2/3 C. seedless raspberry jam or jam of choice
Confectioners' sugar, optional

Preheat oven to 425°F. Beat first 4 ingredients until smooth; beat in 1 egg yolk.

Mix water and remaining egg yolk. On a lightly floured surface, unfold each sheet of puff pastry; roll into a 12-in. square. Cut each into nine 4-in. squares; transfer to parchment-lined baking sheets.

Top each square with 1 T. cream cheese mixture and 1 rounded tsp. jam. Bring 2 opposite corners of pastry over filling, sealing with yolk mixture. Brush tops with remaining yolk mixture.

Bake until golden brown, 14-16 min. Serve warm and, if desired, sprinkle with confectioners' sugar. Refrigerate leftovers.

Holiday Salsa

Prep: 20 min.

Servings: 12

1 pkg. (12 oz.) fresh or frozen cranberries
1 C. sugar
6 green onions, chopped
1/2 C. fresh cilantro leaves, chopped
1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and finely chopped
1 pkg. (8 oz.) cream cheese, softened
Assorted crackers or tortilla chips

Pulse cranberries and sugar in a food processor until coarsely chopped. Stir together with onions, cilantro and jalapeno. Cover and refrigerate several hours or overnight.

To serve, place cream cheese on a serving plate. Drain salsa; spoon over cream cheese. Serve with crackers or chips.

Bacon Cheeseburger Balls

Prep: 25 min.

Cook: 10 min.

Servings: 3 doz.

1 lg. egg
1 envelope onion soup mix
1 lb. ground beef
2 T. all-purpose flour
2 T. 2% milk
1 C. shredded cheddar cheese
4 bacon strips, cooked and crumbled

Coating:

2 lg. eggs
1 C. crushed saltines (about 30 crackers)
5 T. canola oil

In a large bowl, combine egg and soup mix. Crumble beef over mixture and mix lightly but thoroughly. Divide into 36 portions; set aside. In another large bowl, combine the flour and milk until smooth. Add cheese and bacon; mix lightly but thoroughly.

Shape cheese mixture into 36 balls. Shape 1 beef portion around each cheese ball. In a shallow bowl, beat eggs for coating. Place cracker crumbs in another bowl. Dip meatballs into beaten eggs, then coat with crumbs.

Heat oil in a large cast-iron or other heavy skillet over medium heat. Cook meatballs until meat is no longer pink and coating is golden brown, 10-12 min.

Mac and Cheese Bites

Prep: 35 min

Cook: 10 min

Servings: 3 doz.

2 C. uncooked elbow macaroni
1 C. seasoned bread crumbs, divided
2 T. butter
2 T. all-purpose flour
1/2 tsp. onion powder
1/2 tsp. garlic powder
1/2 tsp. seasoned salt
1-3/4 C. 2% milk
2 C. shredded sharp cheddar cheese, divided
1 C. shredded Swiss cheese
3/4 C. biscuit/baking mix
2 lg. eggs, room temperature, lightly beaten

Preheat oven to 425°. Cook macaroni according to package directions; drain.

Meanwhile, sprinkle 1/4 cup bread crumbs into 36 greased mini-muffin cups. In a large saucepan, melt butter over medium heat. Stir in flour and seasonings until smooth; gradually whisk in milk. Bring to a boil, stirring constantly; cook and stir until thickened, 1-2 minutes. Stir in 1 cup cheddar cheese and Swiss cheese until melted.

Remove from heat; stir in biscuit mix, eggs and 1/2 cup bread crumbs. Add macaroni; toss to coat. Spoon about 2 tablespoons macaroni mixture into each prepared mini-muffin cups; sprinkle with remaining cheddar cheese and seasoned bread crumbs.

Bake until golden brown, 8-10 minutes. Cool in pans 5 minutes before serving.

Smoked Salmon Bites

Prep: 20 min.
Servings: 2 doz.

6 radishes or 24 assorted crackers
1/2 C. plain Greek yogurt
4 oz. smoked salmon or lox, cut into bite-sized pieces
3 T. drained capers
3 T. finely chopped red onion

Cut each radish crosswise into 4 slices; arrange on a platter. Spoon 1/2 tsp. yogurt over each slice; top with salmon and remaining yogurt. Sprinkle half the appetizers with capers; sprinkle remaining appetizers with onion. Refrigerate leftovers.

Roasted Chicken and Brie Holly Mini Bites

Prep: 20 min.
Cook: 5 min.
Servings: 24 mini sandwiches

1 French bread baguette (10-1/2 oz.)
1/4 C. mayonnaise
1-1/2 tsp. garlic paste
12 slices deli chicken, halved
1/4 C. apple jelly
1/4 C. fig preserves
24 fresh baby spinach leaves
4 oz. mini Brie cheese wheel
1/3 C. sweetened dried cranberries

Preheat broiler. Cut baguette into 24 slices; place on foil-lined baking sheets. Combine mayonnaise and garlic; spread evenly over baguette slices. Add 1 piece of chicken to each. Combine apple jelly and fig preserves; spread evenly over chicken.

Add 1 baby spinach leaf to each slice. Standing the Brie wheel on end, cut crosswise into 6 narrow slices. Lay slices flat; cut each into 4 wedges. Add 1 cheese wedge to each baguette. Top with 3 cranberries. Broil 3-4 in. from heat until cheese is melted, 1-2 min. Cool 5 min. before serving.

Toasted Ravioli

Prep: 15 min.
Cook: 20 min.
Servings: 1-1/2 doz.

1 C. seasoned bread crumbs
1/4 C. shredded Parmesan cheese
2 tsp. dried basil
1 C. all-purpose flour
2 lg. eggs, lightly beaten
1 pkg. (9 oz.) refrigerated or frozen beef ravioli, thawed
Oil for deep-fat frying
Optional: Fresh minced basil and additional shredded Parmesan cheese
1 C. marinara sauce

In a shallow bowl, mix bread crumbs, Parmesan cheese and basil. Place flour and eggs in separate shallow bowls. Dip ravioli in flour to coat both sides; shake off excess. Dip in egg, then in crumb mixture, patting to help coating adhere.

In a deep cast-iron or electric skillet, heat 1/2 in. of oil to 375°F. Fry ravioli, a few at a time, until golden brown, 1-2 min. on each side. Drain on paper towels. If desired, immediately sprinkle with basil and cheese. Serve warm with marinara sauce.

Holiday Meringue Miniatures

Prep: 20 min.

Cook: 1 hr.

Servings: 7 doz.

2 lg. egg whites, room temperature
1/2 tsp. white vinegar
Dash salt
1/2 tsp. almond extract
1/2 tsp. vanilla extract
1/2 C. sugar
Red gel food coloring

Preheat oven to 225°F. Beat egg whites with vinegar and salt on medium speed until foamy and doubled in volume. Beat in extracts. Gradually add sugar, 1 T. at a time, beating on high after each addition until sugar is dissolved. Continue beating until stiff glossy peaks form, about 10 min.

Insert a 1/2-inch round tip into a pastry bag. Paint 5 stripes of red food coloring inside the length of the pastry bag. Transfer meringue to pastry bag; pipe dollops 1 inch apart onto parchment-lined baking sheets.

Bake 1 hour or until set and dry. Turn off oven (do not open oven door); leave meringues in oven 1 hour. Remove and cool completely on baking sheets. Remove meringues from paper; store in an airtight container at room temperature.

Miniature Almond Tarts

Prep: 35 min.

Cook: 25 min.

Servings: 4 doz.

1 C. butter, softened
6 oz. cream cheese, softened
2 C. all-purpose flour

Filling:

6 oz. almond paste, crumbled
2 lg. eggs, lightly beaten
1/2 C. sugar

Frosting:

1-1/2 C. confectioners' sugar
3 T. butter, softened
4 to 5 tsp. 2% milk
48 maraschino cherry halves

In a large bowl, cream the butter and cream cheese until smooth. Gradually add flour until well blended. Refrigerate for 1 hour.

Shape into 1-in. balls. Place in 48 ungreased miniature muffin cups; press onto the bottom and up the sides to form a shell.

For Filling: in a small bowl, beat the almond paste, eggs and sugar until blended. Fill each shell with about 1-1/2 teaspoons filling.

Bake at 325° for 25-30 min. or until edges are golden brown. Cool for 10 min. before removing to wire racks to cool completely.

Frosting: combine the confectioners' sugar, butter and enough milk to achieve desired consistency. Pipe or spread over tarts. Top each with a cherry half.

Quote of the Week:

“Gifts of time and love are surely the basic ingredients of a truly merry Christmas.”

~ Peg Bracken