

## NIBBLES FOR THE NEW YEAR

Traditionally a cocktail or two are the beverages of choice for New Year's Eve or Day. Of course, I wouldn't refuse a nice glass of sparkling wine or Champagne either to celebrate. With any of those, a few nibbles can't be far behind.

Slices of toasted baguette with prosciutto and dishes of olives and toasted nuts are great but why not add a couple of other offerings. A simple favorite is sliced radishes with good, cultured butter and flaky sea salt is a start. Here are some other ideas for your New Year's gathering. Pick a couple to try.

### CHEDDAR GOUGÈRES

Makes 20

These little golden puffs are addictive. A French classic, they usually make theirs with Gruyère, but I've used a nice cheddar here. They are usually eaten by themselves, but you can also split them and fill them with a mousse of chicken, ham, or even shrimp salad for a more substantial hors d'oeuvres. If you aren't baking the gougères immediately, shape pans of gougères dough, sprinkle with cheese, and freeze for 1/2 hour. Transfer to a freezer bag at this point, until you're ready to bake. Bake straight from the freezer, same as below, adding a couple of extra minutes.

1 cup water  
8 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into pieces  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1 cup all-purpose flour  
4 large eggs  
1 1/2 teaspoons dry mustard  
1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper  
1 1/2 cups (about 6 ounces) shredded sharp Cheddar cheese

Preheat the oven to 375°F. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper or silicone baking mats.

Put the water, butter, and salt in a medium, heavy saucepan and place over medium-high heat. Cook, swirling the pan a few times until the butter melts; once it has melted, increase the heat to high and bring the mixture to a rolling boil. Turn off the heat and dump in the flour all at once. Beat the mixture with a wooden spoon until it starts to pull away from the sides of the pan.

Take the pan off the stove, set it on a hot pad, and let it cool a bit, without stirring, for 2 to 3 minutes.

Add the eggs, 1 at a time, beating the mixture well with the spoon after each addition (you have to put some muscle into it to incorporate the eggs fully). With each addition, the dough should look glossy and slick at first, then stick to the sides of the pan before you add the next egg. After beating in the last egg, beat in the dry mustard and cayenne, then the cheese.

Scoop up a heaping teaspoon of dough and with another spoon, push it off onto the paper-lined baking sheet (it should form a mound about 1 inch in diameter). Continue with the remaining dough, leaving an inch of space

between the gougères (work in batches if necessary, the dough can stand, covered with buttered waxed paper or parchment, for up to 1/2 hour).

Bake until the gougères are puffy and light golden, about 25 minutes, switching pan positions halfway through. Remove from oven and let cool slightly before serving or turn off oven and let gougères remain in oven, with door ajar, for up to 1 hour. They can also be baked ahead, cooled and refrigerated for a day. Reheat in the oven before serving.



Beth Schlanker, Santa Rosa Press Democrat

## PEEL 'N EAT SHRIMPS

Serves 6 – 8

This is one of the easiest party dishes that one can do with solid Southern roots. Be sure that shrimps are from sustainable and wholesome sources. American wild or farm raised are always a safe bet according to Seafood Watch.

Zatarain's was started in the 1886 in New Orleans and now has a broad range of Cajun style products. The brand is currently owned by McCormick, the world's largest spice company. It's widely available in stores and on-line and it's good!

2 pounds shell-on large shrimp, shells split up the back and shrimp deveined  
2 teaspoons unsalted butter, melted  
Zatarain's Crawfish, Shrimp and Crab Boil

Rémoulade sauce (recipe follows)

Following directions on the Zatarain's package, heat a large pot of boiling salted water, cook shrimp until pink and still very slightly translucent in the center, about 3 minutes. They will continue to cook after draining. Drain and transfer to a bowl. Add butter and toss to coat. Serve warm or at room temperature with rémoulade sauce.

### Rémoulade sauce

Makes 1 cup

Best made a couple of hours ahead for flavors to develop. Can be stored refrigerated for up to 5 days.

3/4 cup mayonnaise

1 tablespoon finely chopped green onion

1 tablespoon cup finely chopped red bell pepper

1 tablespoon drained, roughly chopped capers

1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley

1 teaspoon grain mustard

2 teaspoons prepared horse radish

Dashes hot sauce and lemon juice to taste

Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Lukewarm water

Combine all in a bowl and adjust taste to your liking. Stir in a tablespoon or two of lukewarm water to thin if desired.

## **OYSTER AND SANGRITA SHOOTERS**

Makes 10 two-ounce shooters

This is a fun little starter for any gathering, especially if you are outside on a warm day

2 cups tomato juice

1/4 cup fresh orange juice

1 tablespoon fresh lime or lemon juice (or to taste)

1 tablespoon brown sugar

Drops of Worcestershire sauce, preferably white to taste

Tablespoon of olive brine from a jar of green olives, or to taste

Hot sauce to taste

Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

10 freshly shucked half shell size oysters

Stir all ingredients except oysters together and chill for at least one hour for flavors to marry. Taste again just before serving and adjust flavor to your taste. Fill 10 shot glasses with the sangrita, drop in an oyster and throw it back!



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## VIETNAMESE STYLE MEATBALLS WITH PEANUT SAUCE

Makes 16 or so

1 pound ground chicken or turkey  
2 tablespoons minced fresh ginger  
1/3 cup minced scallions  
1/3 cup chopped cilantro  
1 tablespoon fish sauce  
2 teaspoons chile garlic sauce  
1 tablespoon brown sugar  
1 tablespoon cornstarch  
Salt and pepper if needed  
1 tablespoon vegetable oil  
Peanut sauce (recipe follows)

Heat oven to 375°. In a large bowl mix the first 8 ingredients together until just combined. The key to tender meatballs is gentle mixing so don't overmix. Suggest you sauté a little nubbin of the mixture to check seasoning and adjust to your taste. Wet hands and form the meat mixture into approximately 1-1/2-inch balls.

Heat the oil over in an oven proof sauté pan over medium high heat. In batches if necessary, lightly brown the meatballs on all sides. Bake for 10 – 12 minutes or until internal temperature reaches 160°. Meatballs can be cooked ahead and reheated or frozen for later use.

Serve warm with Peanut Sauce.

### Peanut Sauce

Makes 1 cup

1/2 cup smooth peanut butter  
2 tablespoons soy sauce  
2 tablespoons maple or agave syrup  
2 tablespoons lime juice  
1 tablespoon toasted sesame oil  
1 teaspoon chile garlic sauce  
1/4 cup warm water

Add all ingredients to a blender a puree. Add water if needed to make a smooth, pourable sauce. Adjust salt/sweet/sour/hot to your taste. Can be made 3 days ahead and stored covered and refrigerated.



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## **KOREAN FRIED CHICKEN WINGS**

Serves 4 depending on your appetite

A little nibble from John's James Beard award winning cookbook: *Culinary Birds*. Gojujang chile paste is one of the indispensable condiments in the Korean kitchen. It is made by combining powdered red chili peppers, glutinous rice powder and soybean paste.

Canola or other vegetable oil for frying  
2 tablespoons pressed fresh garlic  
1-1/2" piece peeled ginger, finely minced  
3 tablespoons soy sauce  
3 tablespoons gojulang  
1-1/2 tablespoons rice vinegar  
1 tablespoon toasted Asian sesame oil  
2 tablespoons honey  
1/3 cup each rice flour, all-purpose flour and corn starch  
16 chicken wings, tips removed and saved for stock (about 1 3/4 lbs.)  
Toasted sesame seeds  
Bias cut green onions

Pour oil into a 6-qt. pot to a depth of 2". Heat over medium-high heat until a thermometer reads 350°.

Add garlic, ginger, soy sauce, gojulang, vinegar, sesame oil and honey to a blender and blend until smooth. Set aside.in a large bowl.

Whisk flours and cornstarch together with 1 cup water in another bowl. Should be the consistency of pancake batter. Add chicken and turn to coat. Working in batches, drain wings briefly and fry chicken until golden and crisp, 6 - 8 minutes. Drain on paper towels. Can be done a couple of hours ahead of time and held at room temperature.

When ready to serve return oil to 350°. Fry chicken until crisp and hot, 2 - 3 minutes more. Drain again. Toss chicken in sauce and serve hot topped with sesame seeds and green onions. Alternately you can forego the second frying and place the chicken in a single layer on a sheet pan in a hot 400-degree oven for a few minutes to heat and crisp the chicken before tossing with the sauce.

### **LA FARINATA (CHICKPEA PANCAKE)**

Makes 2 medium pancakes (8 to 12 servings)

A recipe from Liguria in Italy, this makes a great afternoon snack or party starter. Chickpea flour is available at many large supermarkets such as Whole Foods. Look for the Bob's Red Mill brand. The batter needs to rest for at least 30 minutes and can be refrigerated for up to 2 days. Drizzle with fragrant olive oil, shavings of Parmigiano Reggiano, top with a little peperonata or marinated mushrooms, or whatever you like.

1 cup chickpea flour  
1/2 cup cold water, or as needed  
Fragrant extra-virgin olive oil  
Coarse sea salt  
2 tablespoons fresh rosemary leaves, roughly chopped  
Freshly ground black pepper

The process is similar to making a regular pancake.

Combine the chickpea flour and enough of the water in a mixing bowl to make a thick batter, stirring to dissolve any lumps. Add the remaining water until the batter is the consistency of tahini or thick pouring cream. Add a teaspoon or so of oil and the salt; mix well. Let sit at room temperature for 30 minutes, or cover and refrigerate for up to 2 days.

Just before serving, heat 2 tablespoons of the oil in a large nonstick skillet (10 to 12 inches) over medium-high heat and add half the rosemary. When the oil is hot (after about 30 seconds), the rosemary will start to "jump" in the skillet.

Pour half of the batter into the skillet. It should cover the bottom of the skillet to a depth of about 1/8 inch. Cook for 1 or 2 minutes, until the pancake is set crisped and golden underneath. Carefully turn over and cook for 30 seconds to 1 minute. Slide onto a serving plate. Cut into wedges, sprinkle with salt and generous grindings of pepper. Serve immediately. Make the second pancake in the same manner.

## **OLIVES AND ALMONDS**

Makes about 2 cups

The combination of these two makes a fantastic little snack to serve with wine or cocktails. Because I'm a California boy I use our local crop. If possible, get those that have been roasted in the shell (not the hard outer shell but the soft inner shell which is very easy to open. For an interesting variation, see if you can find Marcona almonds. These come from Spain and unlike our California varieties have a hard outer shell and are larger and flatter than California varieties. In Spain, the Marconas are peeled and then fried in olive oil and lightly salted. The recipe below assumes you can't find either and uses whole peeled almonds which are generally available in supermarkets.

1 cup whole skinned raw almonds  
3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil  
Sea salt  
1 cup Lucques, Picholine, Cerignola or Gaeta olives  
2 teaspoons finely chopped fresh thyme or rosemary  
1 teaspoon finely grated lemon zest  
Freshly ground black pepper (optional)

Toast the almonds in a preheated 375-degree oven for 10 minutes or so or until they are browned and fragrant. Nuts need to be toasty but not burned or else they will be bitter. Remove and toss the warm nuts with one tablespoon of the olive oil and lightly salt.

Briefly rinse the olives, pat dry with paper towels and toss with remaining two tablespoons oil, thyme and lemon zest. Add a grind or two of pepper if desired and mix with the almonds. Serve with a little bowl on the side for olive pits!



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## MT. TAM TOASTS

Makes 12

I adapted this idea from Cow Girl Creamery which they used as a part of a delicious chicory salad. Easy to make. Pop into the oven to melt the cheese just before serving.

1 baguette sliced diagonally into twelve 1/2-inch toasts

Olive oil

1 small Fuyu persimmon or tart sweet apple, cut into 12 thin wedges

1/2 wheel of Mt. Tam cheese cut into 12 wedges

Fig or peach jam

Flaky salt if desired

Preheat oven to 425°. Brush toasts lightly with olive oil on both sides and place them on a foil lined baking sheet. Place in the oven for 10 minutes or until lightly browned. We're shooting for toasts which are crispy on the outside and a little soft in the center.

Top each toast with a slice of persimmon and then a slice of Mt. Tam cheese. When ready to serve, turn the oven to broil. Place the now topped toasts under the broiler until the cheese is melted and starting to bubble, a minute or two.

Remove from oven, top with a little nubbin of fig jam, salt if desired and serve warm.

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