

THANKSGIVING 2017 RECIPES

For all the years that I've fixed Thanksgiving my kids especially have been adamant about keeping it traditional: turkey, stuffing, cranberry sauce and pumpkin pie. They are inventive and creative eaters and cooks every other day of the year but you don't mess with their Thanksgiving menu.

How about your family?? Sound familiar?? Well here are some appetizer and starter dishes that I've been able to slip in over the years that now show up on the table too. Hope you'll enjoy them and that they'll become part of your tradition.

BACON WRAPPED DATES WITH ALMONDS AND GOAT CHEESE

Makes 24

A simple little hors d'oeuvre that is addictive! Use what cheese you like.

24 large moist dates, such as medjool
12 slices of bacon
4 ounces softened fresh goat cheese
24 whole toasted unsalted almonds

Move oven rack to upper third of oven and preheat oven to 475 °.

Pit dates carefully to hold as much of their shape as you can. Halve the 12 slices of bacon crosswise. If available, put the goat cheese into a pastry bag fitted with a round, plain 1/4" tip.

Stuff cavity of each date with 1 almond. Pipe goat cheese into each stuffed date or alternately use a small demi-tasse spoon. Wrap 1 piece of bacon around width of each date.

Put dates on a baking sheet, seam side down, at least 1/2" apart. Bake until bacon is golden and crisp, about 8 minutes. Set aside to cool briefly before serving.

AVOCADO HUMMUS

Makes 1-1/2 cups

This combines the best of what makes guacamole and hummus so delicious. Use as a spread for sandwiches, on crackers or toasted pita triangles as an hors d'oeuvres, with crudités and wherever you are looking for a little healthier substitute for mayonnaise.

Flesh of 2 ripe avocados
1/4 cup tahini (sesame paste)
2 medium cloves garlic, chopped (about 2 teaspoons)
2 teaspoons ground cumin
Juice from 1 large lemon, (about 3 tablespoons)
1 teaspoon toasted sesame oil
1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
Drops of hot sauce to taste
Salt to taste

Combine the avocado, tahini, garlic, cumin, lemon juice, oils, hot sauce and salt to taste in a food processor or blender and process until the mixture is as smooth as sour cream.

Store covered and refrigerated for up to 2 days and adjust seasoning as needed before serving.

OLIVES AND ALMONDS

Makes about 2 cups

The combination of these two makes a fantastic little snack to serve with wine. If you can find Spanish Marcona olives which have been fried in olive oil definitely use those and it saves you a step.

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

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!

CHEDDAR CHIVE GOUGÈRES

Makes 24 or so

These little golden puffs are usually eaten by themselves but you can also split them and fill them with chicken, ham, or lobster salad for more substantial hors d'oeuvres

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
2 tablespoons minced fresh chives

Preheat the oven to 375°F (190°C). 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. 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 counter or hot pad, and let it cool, without stirring, for 3 minutes.

Now, work in 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 and chives.

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 as 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.

DEVILED EGGS WITH CRAB

Makes 16

Being a West Coast boy I use Dungeness crab but you can use whatever you have locally.

8 hard-boiled eggs
1/2 cup mayonnaise
2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
1/2 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
Big pinch cayenne (or more to taste)
1 teaspoon dry sherry
10 ounces crabmeat, picked over for shells and cartilage
Salt and freshly ground pepper
Drops of lemon juice

Garnish: Paprika, preferably smoked if available

Cut the eggs in half lengthwise. Carefully remove the hard yolks from the eggs, making sure not to break the 16 halves of hard-boiled whites that remain. Place the yolks in a mixing bowl.

Mash the yolks with a fork. Add the mayonnaise, mustard, Worcestershire sauce, cayenne and sherry. Blend well until the mixture is smooth. Fold in the crabmeat, trying to keep the crab pieces as intact as possible. Season to your taste with salt, pepper and lemon juice. Gently spoon into whites. Garnish with paprika and serve. Can be made a couple of hours ahead and refrigerated.

QUICK MARINATED SALMON

Serves 4 as a starter course

This is a gravlax approach which the Scandinavians are famous for. Here I don't marinate for a day or two as we would for ordinary gravlax but cure it for just a few minutes and then top with a lemon and herb vinaigrette.

1/2 pound salmon, skin on and chilled
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
1 teaspoon coarsely chopped tarragon
2 teaspoons coarsely chopped parsley
1 teaspoon chopped chives
Juice of 1 lemon
3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
2 teaspoons drained small capers
2 teaspoons rinsed fresh salmon caviar
Good crackers or black bread, sliced, to serve alongside.

Slice the salmon on a 45-degree bias as thinly as you can without tearing it. Using the skin as your guide, slide the knife as close to it as possible (there should be no skin adhering to the slice). Use long sawing strokes to make the slices. It's best if you can almost see through the fish. Cut away and discard any of the dark meat. Each slice should be about 1 ounce.

Sprinkle each plate of 4 plates with a little salt and pepper and lay two slices of the salmon neatly on top. Sprinkle with a little more salt and pepper and cover with plastic wrap for 15 minutes to allow the salmon to quick cure.

To serve: Whisk together the herbs, lemon juice and olive oil. Drizzle over the salmon and scatter the capers and salmon eggs over. Serve immediately with crisp crackers or thinly sliced toasted bread.

ELIZABETH WHITE'S STEAMED CRANBERRY PUDDING

Serves 8 or so

This is a recipe I got from Tom Darlington of Medford New Jersey whose Aunt Elizabeth was one of the prominent pioneers in the cranberry industry. She is credited with creating individual cellophane packaging as part of her work with the Ocean Spray cooperative. Tom does this in an antique 6 cup steamer mold. You can buy steamed pudding molds in good cookware stores especially around the holidays. You can also use an empty coffee can with a tight fitting lid

which is what my Grandmother did. He notes that “*Aunt Elizabeth carefully cut each berry in half cross wise, which takes a long time! I cut them randomly and my daughter zips them briefly in the food processor. The flavor is the same but I think the larger pieces of the tart berries adds something.*”

2 teaspoons baking soda dissolved in ½ cup hot water
1/2 cup molasses
1-1/2 cups flour
1/4 teaspoon each cinnamon, cloves and nutmeg
2 cups cranberries cut in half
Butter for coating pudding mold
Dessert sauce (recipe follows)

Add soda mixture and molasses to a bowl. Add 1/2 cup flour and mix till smooth. Add spices, cranberries and rest of flour and mix. Till evenly moistened. Butter the inside of the pudding mold, cover tightly and steam in a covered pot for 1-1/2 hours. Serve hot with sauce.

Dessert Sauce

1 cup sugar
1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter
1/2 cup heavy cream
1 teaspoon vanilla
Pinch of salt

Add ingredients to the top of a double boiler and cook whisking occasionally till smooth. Serve warm.

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