

Holiday Fare-2 Colorful and Tasty

Many folks serve lasagna on Christmas Eve. Prepare it ahead, and it'll feed an army. I like to make a colorful pan of stuffed peppers, and keeping all those holiday treats and calories in mind, I make it vegetarian, served with a nice salad. Double them if you're entertaining. Here's your complete, mostly red and green, Christmas Eve (or any eve) supper from appetizer to salad to entrée that you can make ahead.

Cranberry Orange Cheese Ball

A lovely combination and a great way to start a meal.

Ingredients for the Cheese Ball

- 1 cup dried cranberries, chopped
- ¼ cup frozen orange juice concentrate, thawed
- 2 pkgs (8-oz ea) cream cheese, softened
- ¼ cup powdered sugar

Ingredients for the Caramelized Pecans

- ¾ cup coarsely chopped pecans
- 1 Tbs butter
- 2 Tbs sugar

Directions

1. Chop cranberries in a blender or food processor. Add cream cheese, juice, and sugar, and blend till well mixed.
2. Use a rubber scraper to turn mixture out onto a piece of wax paper and shape into a ball as best you can. Place in a bowl and wrap with the wax paper. Refrigerate overnight.
3. Melt butter in a small saucepan on medium heat. add pecans and sugar and stir about 3-5 minutes. Do not let it burn! Spread on sheet of wax paper or parchment to cool.
4. When ready to serve, remove cheese from 'fridge and shape into a ball. Pat pecans on to cover. Serve with crackers, celery and carrot sticks, or pita chips.

Broccoli Salad

This is Trisha Yearwood's recipe. It is very good, and the sunflower seeds are a nice touch.

Ingredients

- 4-5 cups broccoli florets, blanched for 3 minutes, shocked in icewater, and very well-drained
- ½ small sweet onion, minced
- ¾ cups golden raisins
- 1 Tbs apple cider vinegar
- ¼ cup sugar
- ¾ cup mayonnaise
- ½ jar pimentos, chopped
- Salt & pepper
- 4 slices bacon, diced and browned
- ¼ cup sunflower seeds

Directions

1. In a large bowl, mix mayo, sugar, vinegar, raisins, onions, and salt and pepper to taste. Add broccoli and pimentos to coat.

2. Refrigerate 2-3 hours or overnight. Sprinkle with bacon and seeds just before serving.

Saucy Stuffed Peppers

I make these with tempeh, a fermented soy product found in the vegetarian section of your store. Healthy, tasty, and very good for you, you won't miss the meat. (Of course you can use ground meat if you wish.)

Ingredients

- 3 colorful bell peppers (I use red and green this time of year!), halved lengthwise, and seeded
- 1 8-oz block of tempeh (I like the one with flax seed), crumbled
- 6 lg or 12 sm fresh mushrooms, chopped
- 6 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 medium onion
- 1 tsp Italian seasoning
- 3 Tbs Progresso Italian Bread Crumbs
- 2 Tbs olive oil
- Salt & pepper
- 1 24-oz can Hunt's Original spaghetti sauce (or your own homemade—even better!), divided
- ½ cup grated parmesan cheese, divided
- 1 cup shredded mozzarella

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 375°.
2. Blanch seeded pepper halves by boiling five minutes. Handle carefully with tongs. Shock in icewater. Drain well.
3. Cover the bottom of a 9 x 13 Pyrex dish with sauce reserving ½ cup for filling. Nest all six pepper halves into sauce, cut side up. Set aside.
4. In a large skillet, place olive oil, and heat on medium till shimmering; add onions and garlic,, stirring often, for about four minutes till soft. Sprinkle with Italian seasoning. Add tempeh and press with a fork to improve the crumble texture.
5. Add mushrooms and ½ cup reserved sauce, stirring to coat.
6. Add bread crumbs, ¼ cup of the parmesan, and salt and pepper to taste. Cover and bring to a simmer for about 5 minutes. Remove from heat; stir well.
7. Fill pepper halves with tempeh mixture, dividing evenly. Cover with foil and bake 20-25 minutes or till sauce is bubbling and peppers are tender..
8. Mix mozzarella with remaining parmesan. Remove foil, sprinkle with cheese mixture; return to oven till cheese is melted and browning. Serve orzo pasta topped with a pepper half or two and a dollop of sauce.

Variation:

If you need to double the servings to six peppers (12 halves), you can increase the filling without needing more tempeh by adding 6-8 more mushrooms, a can of well-drained petite diced tomatoes, and a half bag of washed baby spinach. Increase oil to 3 Tbs and double the breadcrumbs and cheese. Cooked rice can also help stretch it.

No-Hassle Wassail

Serve this tasty hot drink when the carolers come home from a frosty night of song. Or just anytime you're in the mood for a sweet, spiced treat. You can cut ingredients in half for a smaller crowd. The rum is optional, of course!

Ingredients

- 1 gallon apple cider

- ½ gallon apricot nectar
- ¼ cup lemon juice
- 1 ½ cups dark brown sugar
- 3 cups dark rum
- 6 cinnamon sticks

Directions

1. Mix all ingredients in a large pot. Simmer until a heavenly aroma fills the kitchen.
2. Transfer to a crockpot and keep warm while serving.
3. For a fancier look, float orange slices decorated with cloves among the cinnamon sticks.

Overnight Coffee Cake

Serve this to overnight guests or your family on Christmas morning. They'll think you're wonderful!

Ingredients

- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup white sugar
- 1 cup sour cream
- 2/3 cup butter
- 1 cup brown sugar, divided
- 2 eggs
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ½ cup chopped nuts
- ¼ nutmeg
- 1 tsp vanilla

Directions

1. Grease a 9x13 pan. Set aside. Place flour, white sugar, sour cream, butter, half of brown sugar, eggs, baking powder and soda, cinnamon, and vanilla in a large bowl.
2. Beat at medium speed till blended. Spread in prepared pan.
3. Combine remaining brown sugar, nuts, and nutmeg. Sprinkle evenly over batter. Cover and refrigerate overnight or up to 24 hours.
4. Next morning, preheat oven to 350°. Remove cover from pan and bake 35-40 minutes until it tests done.
5. Very aromatic, warm, and delicious.