



Candied Mixed Nuts with Rosemary

Slightly sweet and slightly spicy, these nuts are easy to prepare and make a satisfying snack when guests gather for dinner. You can toast the nuts up to 3 days in advance, but don't toss with the rosemary leaves. Let cool, then place in an airtight container and store at room temperature. Just before serving, wrap the nuts in aluminum foil and warm in a 350°F oven. Toss with the rosemary leaves and serve.

Preheat an oven to 350°F. Line a baking sheet with aluminum foil.

In a large bowl, combine the nuts, butter, oil, brown sugar, cayenne and salt and toss to coat well. (If you prefer spicier nuts, add more cayenne, to taste.) Spread the nuts out on the prepared baking sheet and top with the thyme and rosemary sprigs. Transfer to the oven and toast the nuts, stirring occasionally, until they are slightly darker in color, 20 to 25 minutes. Discard the herb sprigs.

Transfer the nuts to a bowl and toss with the rosemary leaves. Let cool for 5 to 10 minutes. Serve warm or at room temperature. Serves 6 to 8.

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1 lb. assorted raw mixed nuts
2 Tbs. unsalted butter, melted
2 Tbs. canola oil
2 Tbs. firmly packed light brown sugar
¼ tsp. cayenne pepper, plus more, to taste
Kosher salt, to taste
4 fresh thyme sprigs
2 fresh rosemary sprigs, plus 2 Tbs. rosemary leaves



Prosciutto-Wrapped Figs with St. Agur

These simple hors d'oeuvres make an impressive presentation at holiday gatherings or cocktail parties. You can stuff and wrap the figs a day in advance; cover the baking sheet tightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate. Let them come to room temperature before baking.

Preheat an oven to 450°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

Using a small, sharp knife, cut a slit in the side of each fig and use your fingers to gently create an opening. Lay the figs, cut side up, on a work surface. Crumble the cheese and stuff each fig with ¼ to ½ tsp. cheese (depending on the size of the fig).

Cut the prosciutto into strips that are just long enough and wide enough to wrap around the figs. Wrap each fig with a prosciutto strip, making sure that the seam side is facing down, opposite the cut side.

Arrange the figs on the prepared baking sheet. Transfer to the oven and bake for 5 minutes, rotating the baking sheet 180 degrees halfway through. Transfer the figs to a platter and serve immediately. Serves 6 to 8.

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48 dried figs
¼ oz. St. Agur or other good-quality blue cheese
7 oz. thinly sliced prosciutto

Harvest Centerpieces

Vases filled with flowers and natural elements, flickering candles, bowls overflowing with seasonal ingredients—these displays of autumn complete the romance of the Thanksgiving feast. Our tips will inspire you to be bold with color and creative with your holiday presentation.



Add drama to your table with unexpected height. Tree branches give a nod to the season, and the natural hues complement a harvest celebration.



A pop of vibrant color creates a beautiful contrast to shades of green and chestnut. A silver pitcher transforms simple into elegant, an eye-catching alternative to a glass vase.



Group clusters of candles on a table runner or plate for a cozy glow. Fill out the centerpiece with greenery and seasonal berries, or even sprigs of herbs.



For a casual table, consider a potted centerpiece, which lends a rustic touch. A burlap runner or earth-toned tablecloth is the perfect accompaniment.



Arrange persimmons, apples, pears, pomegranates or other seasonal ingredients in a decorative dish or bowl. Sprays of fall foliage can be tucked between the fruit for a bountiful feel.



When flowers and candles begin to crowd smaller tables, make the food part of your display. A colorful soup tureen or platter can be both beautiful and practical.

Tempting Starters

Thanksgiving entertaining should be as much fun for the hosts as it is for the guests. When your guests arrive, welcome them with a glass of sparkling wine and some simple yet festive appetizers. The recipes featured here fit the bill nicely—they'll satisfy hungry diners yet won't spoil appetites for the feast to come. And best of all, you can do most of the preparation in advance.

¾ cup pistachio nuts
4 heads red or white Belgian endive
1 large pomegranate
2 Fuyu persimmons
8 oz. feta cheese, crumbled
Grated zest and juice of 1 lemon
1 tsp. Champagne vinegar
Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil



Endive Salad with Persimmons and Pomegranate

Serve this crisp and refreshing salad when persimmons and pomegranates are in season. Look for the Fuyu variety of persimmons, which are sweet and firm and easy to cut very thin. Any salty or tangy cheese will be excellent in this salad; try using fresh goat cheese or ricotta salata in place of the feta.

In a small fry pan over medium-low heat, toast the pistachios, stirring, until fragrant and starting to brown, about 5 minutes. Pour onto a plate to cool, then chop coarsely and set aside.

Trim the ends from the endive, separate the leaves and place in a large bowl. Seed the pomegranate and pat the seeds dry with paper towels. Using a mandoline or a very sharp knife, slice the persimmons into thin slices.

Add the pomegranate seeds, persimmons, cheese and pistachios to the endive leaves.

In a small bowl, whisk together the lemon zest, lemon juice and vinegar. Season with salt and pepper. Add the olive oil in a thin stream, whisking constantly until the vinaigrette is smooth.

Drizzle the vinaigrette over the salad and gently toss. Season with salt and pepper and serve immediately. Serves 4.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Salad of the Day*, by Georgeanne Brennan (Weldon Owen, 2012).

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Chestnut and Celery Root Soup with Sage Croutons and Bacon

Fresh sage has just a hint of bitterness and a woody, assertive taste. Here, it is used only in the garnishes for this luxurious fall soup. Rather than overpower, it becomes a harmonious flavor accent for the mellow sweetness of the chestnuts and celery root in the soup, and the salty bacon crumbled on top.

Cut off and discard the crusts from the bread. Cut the bread into ½-inch cubes; you should have about 4 cups bread cubes.

In a large fry pan over medium-low heat, melt 1 Tbs. of the butter with the olive oil. Add the garlic and 2 tsp. of the sage and cook gently until the garlic is light golden brown, about 5 minutes. Remove and discard the garlic. Increase the heat to medium, add ¼ tsp. of the salt and the bread cubes, and stir to coat the cubes with the flavored oil. Cook, stirring and tossing often, until the croutons are crisp and toasted, 10 to 12 minutes. Transfer to a bowl.

In a large Dutch oven or other heavy pot over medium heat, cook the bacon until crisp, about 8 minutes. Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate to drain.

Pour off all but 2 Tbs. of the fat from the pot and return to medium heat. Add the remaining 1 Tbs. butter, the onion and celery and sauté until softened, about 7 minutes. Add the celery seed and cook, stirring often, until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add the stock, increase the heat to medium-high and bring to a boil. Add the celery root and chestnuts and return to a boil, then reduce the heat to low, cover partially, and simmer until the celery root is tender when pierced with the tip of a knife, about 25 minutes. Meanwhile, crumble the bacon and set aside.

Working in batches, transfer the soup mixture to a blender and process to a smooth puree. Pour the puree into a clean pot. Add the half-and-half, the remaining 1½ tsp. salt and pepper, to taste. Set the pot over medium-low heat and cook gently, stirring occasionally, until the soup is heated through, about 10 minutes.

Taste and adjust the seasonings with salt and pepper. Ladle into warmed bowls, garnish with the bacon, croutons and the remaining 2 tsp. sage, and serve immediately. Serves 6 to 8.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *New Flavors for Soup*, by Adam Ried (Oxmoor House, 2008).

Decorative Elements

Here is a basic rule for decorating the Thanksgiving table: Repeating patterns create a pleasing effect. This can be achieved by limiting decorations to a few beautiful elements in a few colors. They can be elegant, earthy, antique, modern, refined or whimsical. You can use virtually anything, from a splendid crystal bowl to a humble terra-cotta flowerpot, as long as the total look remains focused and harmonious.

Choose articles that have a special significance for you and your family, such as an heirloom candelabra or platter. Or, select items that fit the mood of the season, such as fresh or dried flowers, pomegranates, apples, pumpkins and squashes, nuts, autumn leaves and branches, and sheaves of wheat. Use a few of these to create a centerpiece, to adorn a central table runner, to add an accent to each place setting and, if you wish, to decorate the buffet, entryway and mantel.

Select candles that complement these elements. They should be either short, such as votives or pillars, or tall enough so that the flame remains above eye level when guests are seated at the table.

Lighting

Dimming overhead lights and using candles or table lamps for illumination is an easy way to bring focus and sparkle to the table, even in the afternoon light. For an elegant setting, use tall tapers (dripless and scent free) set in candlesticks or candelabras. Silver, pewter or crystal candleholders add a formal touch to the setting. Classic ivory-colored candles go with virtually any setting and color palette. For a more casual gathering, line up votives in pretty glass containers or squat pillar candles along the center of the table or around the centerpiece for a glowing effect. Whatever kind of candles you choose for the table, add matching ones to the buffet to help tie the room together.

Seating

Don't worry if your chairs are mismatched. Thanksgiving is a perfect time to be creative with seating, and an eclectic assortment of chairs or even a rustic wooden bench lined with cushions can be inviting and attractive. To create a unified look, use colored ribbon to tie a sprig of leaves or berries to the back of each chair, or use single-color accent chair cushions.

When making your seating plan, consider whether each guest will be comfortable in the chair he or she has been assigned, and seat gregarious guests next to those who are more quiet to keep the conversation balanced. Seat children between adults or set a separate table for the younger guests.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Thanksgiving Entertaining*, by Lou Seibert Pappas (Simon & Schuster, 2005).

Thanksgiving Entertaining

Setting the Scene

Whether your Thanksgiving will be formal or casual, you need to plan in advance how to set up and decorate your space. Begin by choosing a color palette that looks good with your tableware and the room. This palette will help you create a centerpiece, place settings and room decorations that will work together to set a festive mood. Stick with two or three colors and a few complementary textures, such as wood, pewter and foliage. The keys are restraint and simplicity.

Serving Styles

Assess your menu, guest list and level of formality to determine whether to serve the meal buffet, family or restaurant style. Whichever you choose, offering drinks and appetizers before the meal is a warm, welcoming way to start the Thanksgiving meal.

Buffet service is the tried-and-true approach for Thanksgiving because it works equally well for formal and casual entertaining, and makes it easy to organize and serve large quantities of food. Guests make their way through the buffet line, helping themselves to as much of each dish as they want. Once you set out the food, all you have to do is replenish the platters as needed. For large groups, set up a separate buffet station for self-serve beverages, like wine and sparkling water.

Family-style service is well suited to less formal Thanksgiving meals and smaller groups. Choose platters that are small enough to be passed comfortably. Consider serving the turkey on two platters, with light and dark meat on each, instead of on a single large platter, which can be cumbersome. It is helpful to have a sideboard or extra serving table for setting the platters when they are not being passed; this also makes it easier for you to refill platters and bowls. Put bottles of wine and water directly on the table.

Restaurant-style service, in which dishes are individually plated in the kitchen or served by the host from the head of the table, is elegant but involves last-minute work. It is a good option for intimate groups, for simpler meals such as Thanksgiving weekend breakfasts, and for more refined sit-down celebrations.