

Potato-Apple Kugel

Only slightly less traditional for Chanukah than latkes, potato kugel is a lot easier to make and, once it is in the oven, you get to sit down and relax with your guests. This side dish is a perfect accompaniment to the holiday meal, providing the comfort of potatoes with the sweetness of apples. To grate the onion, potatoes and apples, use the large perforations of a box grater or the large grating disk of a food processor.

Preheat an oven to 375°F. Oil a shallow 9-inch round baking dish or pie dish with 1 tsp. of the olive oil.

In a large bowl, combine the onion, potatoes, apples, eggs and 2 Tbs. of the olive oil and stir to mix. Sprinkle with the baking powder, season with salt and pepper, and mix thoroughly. Transfer the potato mixture to the prepared baking dish, spreading the mixture evenly. Drizzle with the remaining 2 tsp. olive oil.

Bake the kugel until the top and sides are golden brown, about 1 hour and 10 minutes. Serve hot or warm with sour cream on the side. Serves 4 to 6.

Leslie Revsin, chef and cookbook author, New York City.

Coconut Macaroons

These macaroons are perfect for gift giving, as they will stay fresh for up to 5 days. To achieve their chewy interior and firm exterior, they are left in the oven with the door ajar for several minutes after they have finished baking. If desired, dress up these cookies by dipping half of each in melted chocolate. Let the chocolate harden before serving.

Preheat an oven to 250°F. Line 2 rimmed baking sheets with parchment paper.

In a bowl, using an electric mixer, beat the egg whites until they just barely hold soft peaks. Beat in the sugar and vanilla and continue beating until stiff peaks form. Set aside.

In a large bowl, stir together the 3 cups coconut and just enough of the condensed milk to make a sticky batter. Fold in the egg white mixture.

Drop the batter by teaspoonfuls onto the prepared baking sheets, spacing them about 1 inch apart. Dip the spoon into cold water every once in a while to prevent the batter from sticking.

Bake until the cookies are golden, 25 to 30 minutes. Turn the oven off. Prop the oven door ajar and leave the cookies in the oven for 10 minutes more. Transfer the baking sheets to wire racks and let the cookies cool completely on the pans, then remove the cookies from the pans.

Serve the cookies on a bed of shredded coconut with a few candied rose petals or violets or both. Store in layers, separated by waxed paper, in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 5 days. Makes about 24 cookies.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Holiday Entertaining*, by Georgeanne Brennan (Oxmoor House, 2007).

Ingredients for Potato-Apple Kugel

3 Tbs. olive oil

¼ cup grated onion

2 lb. baking potatoes, peeled and grated

2 Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored and grated

2 eggs, lightly beaten

1 tsp. baking powder

Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

Sour cream for serving (optional)

Ingredients for Coconut Macaroons

2 egg whites

3 Tbs. sugar

1 tsp. vanilla extract

3 cups sweetened shredded dried coconut, plus more for serving

½ to ¾ cup sweetened condensed milk

Candied rose petals or violets for serving (optional)

December 2011 Holidays

• Chanukah (Festival of Lights), begins Tuesday, Dec. 20

• Christmas (Feast of the Nativity), Sunday, Dec. 25

• Boxing Day (Canada), Monday, Dec. 26

• Kwanzaa, begins Monday, Dec. 26

• New Year's Eve, Saturday, Dec. 31

Ingredients for Orange, Avocado and Fennel Salad

2 fennel bulbs

3 avocados

5 mandarin oranges or 3 large navel oranges

2 tsp. grated orange zest

3 Tbs. olive oil

1 Tbs. fresh orange juice

2 Tbs. white balsamic vinegar

½ tsp. sea salt

½ tsp. freshly ground pepper

½ cup oil-cured black olives, pitted

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Technique Class: Holiday Feast

“The planning, the cooking and the joy you put into your party will be a gift your friends can cherish all year long.”

—Chuck Williams

Our Holiday Planning Guide

Planning ahead will help you stay organized and relaxed during the holidays.

- * Decide on the type of get-together (brunch, formal dinner, cocktail party, etc.).
- * Determine the number of guests.
- * Set a time and a location in your house.
- * Send out invitations (one month prior).
- * Choose an entertaining style (formal, casual).
- * Plan a doable menu that fits the style.
- * Pick a color palette.
- * Select your decorations.
- * Shop for nonperishable items well ahead of the date.
- * Decorate your space and set the table at least one day in advance.

Orange, Avocado and Fennel Salad

Cut off the stems and feathery leaves from each fennel bulb. Reserve a few leaves for garnish. Trim the base and discard the bulb's outer layer, if tough. Finely slice the bulb crosswise into thin pieces. Halve, pit and peel the avocados, then cut lengthwise into slices ½ inch thick. Peel each orange and separate the sections, removing any white pith and seeds. Halve the sections lengthwise.

In a salad bowl, mix together the orange zest, olive oil, orange juice, 1 Tbs. of the vinegar, the salt and pepper. Add the fennel slices, oranges, avocados and olives and toss gently. Divide among chilled salad plates. Drizzle each salad with a little of the remaining vinegar, garnish with fennel leaves and serve immediately. Serves 6 to 8.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Entertaining with the Seasons* (Weldon Owen, 2010).

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Ingredients for Carrot and Ginger Soup

1 Tbs. unsalted butter or olive oil

1 garlic clove

1 small onion, about 3 oz., cut into ½-inch pieces

½ oz. fresh ginger, cut into ½-inch pieces

1½ lb. carrots, cut into ½-inch pieces

¼ tsp. ground cinnamon

⅓ tsp. ground allspice

Pinch of freshly grated nutmeg

Leaves from 1 fresh thyme sprig

½ tsp. kosher salt

3 cups low-sodium chicken broth

1 cup low-sodium vegetable broth

1 cup low-sodium chicken stock

1 cup low-sodium vegetable stock

Ingredients for Beef Tenderloin with Shallot and Syrah Reduction

1 beef tenderloin, 2½ to 3 lb.

2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil

2 tsp. minced fresh thyme

1½ tsp. fine sea salt

1 tsp. freshly ground pepper

2 Tbs. minced shallots

1 cup Syrah

2½ Tbs. unsalted butter (optional)

Carrot and Ginger Soup

This soup, made in the Cuisinart Soup Maker & Blender, is an ideal first course for a holiday feast because you simply add all the ingredients to the soup maker for a delicious, hot dish with minimal effort. To make things even easier, do the prep work the day before.

Put the butter in the blender jar; set the timer for 10 minutes and the temperature on medium. When the butter begins to melt, add the garlic, onion and ginger. Cover the blender jar and stir 5 to 8 quick bursts to break up the ingredients. Continue to stir occasionally while sautéing. Add the carrots, spices, thyme, salt and broth. Cover and stir a few times to combine the ingredients. Set the timer for 20 minutes and the temperature on high. When the mixture comes to a boil, set the timer for 30 minutes and the temperature on medium. Stir once or twice while the soup is simmering.

After 30 minutes, test the carrots. If they are not completely soft, continue to cook on medium. When the carrots are completey soft, turn the blender off. Starting with speed 1 and gradually raising to speed 3, blend the soup until completely smooth, about 2 minutes. Taste and adjust the seasonings as desired. Makes 6 cups.

Recipe courtesy of Cuisinart.

Beef Tenderloin with Shallot and Syrah Reduction

The tenderloin is the most tender cut of beef and is the source of the filet mignon. It needs only relatively brief cooking. The Syrah reduction, made from the flavorful pan juices, is quickly made while the roast rests.

Preheat an oven to 450°F.

Rub the beef all over with the olive oil, then rub on the thyme, salt and pepper.

Place the roast on a rack in a shallow roasting pan just large enough to accommodate it. Roast until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the meat registers 115° to 120°F for rare, about 20 minutes; 125° to 130°F for medium-rare, about 25 minutes; or 130° to 140°F for medium, about 30 minutes. Transfer the roast to a cutting board, cover loosely with aluminum foil and let rest for about 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, remove the rack from the roasting pan and place the pan on the stovetop over medium heat. Add the shallots and sauté, stirring them into the pan juices, until translucent, about 2 minutes. Add the wine a little at a time, stirring to scrape up the browned bits from the pan bottom. Continue to cook until the wine is reduced by nearly half, then stir in the butter. When the butter has melted, remove the pan from the heat and cover to keep warm.

To serve, cut the beef into slices ½ inch thick. Arrange the slices on a warmed platter and drizzle with the sauce. Serve immediately. Serves 8.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Christmas Entertaining* by Georgeanne Brennan (Simon & Schuster, 2005).

Meat Portions for Parties

Whether it is casual or elegant, a buffet simplifies entertaining a houseful of guests. The culinary centerpiece is usually the meat you will serve—and most often a selection of several. To assist you in estimating the amounts needed, we turned to nationally known caterer, Mary Micucci.

Micucci offers this advice for a full-course buffet: “When determining meat quantities, here’s a good rule of thumb. If you are serving one kind of meat, order 8 to 10 oz. of raw meat per person, or 6 to 8 oz. of fish or chicken. If you are serving two kinds, figure on 5 oz. of each per person.”

Broccoli and Blue Cheese Gratin

Choose a mild blue cheese, such as Bleu d’Auvergne or Gorgonzola, for this recipe. The broccoli is first steamed until tender, then cloaked with cheese sauce and topped with buttery crumbs for baking. You can steam the broccoli and prepare the sauce in advance, then finish and bake the dish just before serving.

Preheat an oven to 350°F. Lightly butter a large gratin or baking dish.

Trim and discard the thick stalks from the broccoli. Cut the heads in half lengthwise. Place the broccoli in a steamer rack set over boiling water. Cover and steam until the broccoli is easily pierced with a fork, about 15 minutes. Drain and rinse under cold running water, then coarsely chop. Drain again, transfer to a bowl and set aside.

In a fry pan over medium heat, melt 1 Tbs. of the butter. Add the bread crumbs and cook, stirring, until golden brown, about 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and set aside.

In a saucepan over medium-high heat, melt 4½ Tbs. of the butter. When the butter has melted, remove the pan from the heat and whisk in the flour until smooth. Return the pan to low heat and slowly pour in 1 cup of the milk, whisking constantly. Reduce the heat to low and simmer, stirring occasionally, until thickened, 7 to 10 minutes. Whisk in another 1 cup of the milk. Add the salt, black pepper and cayenne pepper. Continue to simmer, stirring occasionally, until the mixture has thickened again, 5 to 7 minutes. Whisk in the remaining 1 cup milk and simmer until thick enough to coat the back of a spoon, about 5 minutes more. Stir in the cheese and cook, stirring, just until melted, about 2 minutes. Remove from the heat.

Pour the sauce over the broccoli and stir gently to mix. Spoon the mixture into the prepared gratin dish, smooth the surface and top with the buttered bread crumbs. Cut the remaining 1 Tbs. butter into bits and dot the top. Bake until bubbling around the edges and golden on top, about 20 minutes. Serve hot. Serves 12 to 14.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Entertaining with the Seasons* (Weldon Owen, 2010).

Ingredients for Broccoli and Blue Cheese Gratin

6 broccoli heads, about 4 lb. total

6½ Tbs. unsalted butter

¾ cup fresh bread crumbs

4½ Tbs. all-purpose flour

3 cups milk

1 tsp. fine sea salt

1 tsp. freshly ground black pepper

⅓ tsp. cayenne pepper

3 oz. blue cheese, crumbled