



Summer entertaining should be both casual and simple. This week's dinner party menu is just that! The meal starts with a cool and delicious Chilled Cumber Soup with Basil. The creamy soup is a summertime favorite that's easy to prepare, is served cold, and highlights the local basil that's in season.

Cold summer soup is a touch of paradise on a hot summer day! Mediterranean Lamb Kabobs are the highlight of the party! Chunks of lamb are marinated in fresh lemon juice, olive oil, garlic, cumin and oregano, skewered with red bell pepper and fresh mushrooms and grilled over an open fire. Saffron Rice Salad and Curried Slaw can both be made ahead and are the perfect accompaniments! Finish your meal with easy and delicious Walnut Date-Filled Coconut Crescents. A chilled bottle of Pinot Grigio is all you'll need to make your dinner party complete!

Chilled Cucumber Soup with Basil

6 cucumbers, peeled and seeded

1 quart heavy cream

1/2 quart 2% milk

10 fresh basil leaves, minced

1 clove garlic, minced

Salt

Cayenne pepper

In a food processor, chop the cucumbers but do not puree. Combine cucumbers with cream, milk, garlic and basil. Add salt and cayenne pepper to taste, and stir. Chill soup overnight so flavor can develop. Serve chilled. Serves 6.

Mediterranean Lamb Kabobs

3 pounds boneless leg of lamb, trimmed of fat and cut into 1-inch chunks

1/2 cup fresh lemon juice

1 tablespoon olive oil

2 teaspoons minced garlic

1/2 teaspoon ground cumin

1/2 teaspoon dried oregano

Salt

Freshly ground black pepper

2 large red bell peppers, seeded, and cut into 1-inch squares

8 ounces fresh mushrooms, cleaned

Combine lemon juice, olive oil, garlic, cumin, oregano, salt and pepper in a large glass bowl. Add lamb pieces, cover and refrigerate overnight. Prepare gas or charcoal grill. Drain marinade from the lamb pieces and thread on skewers, alternating with the pepper pieces and mushrooms. Grill, testing to determine doneness, according to preference. Serves 6.

Saffron Rice Salad

1 (16-ounce) package yellow saffron rice mix

2 ribs celery, finely chopped

2 green onions, finely chopped

1/2 cup golden raisins

2 tablespoons fresh lime juice

1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger

2 teaspoons curry powder

1 cup mayonnaise or salad dressing (use less or more, according to taste)

Cook rice mix according to package directions, chill. Fold in celery, green onion and raisins. Combine lime juice, ginger, curry powder and mayonnaise in a small bowl, taste to adjust seasonings. Pour the mixture over the rice and toss gently to combine. Cover and chill until ready to serve. Serves 8.

Curried Slaw

For the curry vinaigrette:

2 tablespoons prepared Indian curry paste

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard

2 tablespoons lemon juice

2 tablespoons rice vinegar

1/4 teaspoon salt

3/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

1/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

For the slaw:

4 cups thinly sliced cabbage (about 1/3 head)

1 carrot, peeled and grated

1 jalapeno chili, seeded and finely minced

1/4 cup fresh cilantro leaves

2 green onions, thinly sliced on the diagonal

In a medium bowl, whisk together the curry paste, mustard, lemon juice, vinegar, salt and pepper until salt is dissolved, about 30 seconds. Gradually whisk in the olive oil, and continue to whisk until fully emulsified. (This makes a scant cup of vinaigrette, which will keep for up to three days, covered and refrigerated.) In a large bowl, toss together the cabbage, carrot and jalapeno. Stir the vinaigrette to make sure it is emulsified and toss the slaw with just enough to coat lightly; you may not use all of the vinaigrette. Place the slaw in a serving bowl. Garnish with cilantro leaves and green onion. Serves 4 to 6.

Walnut Date-Filled Coconut Crescents

1/2 cup walnuts

1/4 cup chopped dates

2 tablespoons brown sugar

1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

1 tablespoon butter

1 (8-ounce) can refrigerated crescent rolls

1 egg white, slightly beaten

3/4 cup coconut

Powdered sugar, for dusting

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Spray baking sheet with nonstick cooking spray. In food processor bowl with metal blade, combine walnuts and dates; process until finely chopped. Add brown sugar, cinnamon and butter; process until well blended. Separate dough into 8 triangles. Spread 1 tablespoon walnut mixture evenly over each triangle. Loosely roll up, starting at shortest side and rolling to opposite point. Dip top and sides of each roll in egg white; coat with coconut. Place on prepared baking sheet; curve into crescent shape. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes or until golden brown. Remove from baking sheet. Cool 5 minutes. Lightly sprinkle with powdered sugar. Serves 6 to 8.

The writer owns Catering by Debbi Covington and is the author of two cookbooks, Celebrate Everything! and Dining Under the Carolina Moon. Debbi's website address is www.cateringbydebbicovington.com. She may be reached at 525-0350 or by email at dbc@cateringbydebbicovington.com.

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