



Cooking takes on special joy during the Christmas season! Cocktail parties, intimate dinners, casual gatherings and cookie exchanges all call for the finest holiday foods. Christmas is also a time for remembering special neighbors, co-workers and friends with tasty homemade treats from your kitchen.

This week I've included recipes for a little bit of everything from joyous starters to holiday sweets. These are some of our favorite Christmas dishes! Make this holiday cooking season enjoyable and rewarding with these festive and delicious recipes. Merry Christmas!

Marinated Mushrooms

1 pint whole, uniformly sized, small white button mushroom caps, washed

½ cup olive oil

3 tablespoons tarragon vinegar

¼ cup finely chopped Italian parsley

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard

3 cloves garlic, finely chopped

1 teaspoon sugar

¾ teaspoon dried tarragon leaves

½ teaspoon salt

Freshly ground black pepper

Fill 16-ounce jar with mushrooms. Process remaining ingredients in food processor or combine in small bowl with wire whisk. Pour dressing into jar to cover mushrooms completely. Seal jar and marinate overnight at room temperature to blend flavors. Store up to 1 week in refrigerator. Bring to room temperature before serving. Serves 6.

Baked Artichoke Squares

½ cup plus 3 tablespoons vegetable oil, divided

1 cup chopped mushrooms

¼ cup thinly sliced celery
1 clove garlic, minced
1 (14-ounce) can artichoke hearts, drained and chopped
½ cup chopped green onions
½ teaspoon dried marjoram
¼ teaspoon dried oregano
¼ teaspoon ground red pepper
1 cup (4 ounces) shredded cheddar cheese
1 cup (4 ounces) shredded Monterey jack cheese
2 eggs, slightly beaten
1½ cups all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon salt
¼ cup milk

Heat 3 tablespoons vegetable oil in medium skillet over medium-high heat. Cook and stir mushrooms, celery and garlic in hot oil until celery is tender. Remove from heat. Stir in artichoke hearts, onions, marjoram, oregano and red pepper. Add cheeses and eggs; mix well. Set aside. Combine flour and salt in medium bowl. Blend remaining ½ cup vegetable oil and the milk in small bowl. Add flour to mixture. Stir with fork until mixture forms a ball. Press dough in bottom and 1½ inches up sides of a 9x13x2-inch pan. Bake in a preheated 350 degree oven for 10 minutes. Spread artichoke mixture on baked crust. Continue baking about 20 minutes more or until center is set. Cool slightly. Cut into 24 squares. Serve warm. Serves 6.

Beef Kushisashi

½ cup soy sauce
¼ cup chopped green onions
2 tablespoons sugar
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
1½ teaspoons cornstarch
1 clove garlic, pressed
1 teaspoon grated fresh ginger root
2½ pounds boneless beef sirloin steak

Blend soy sauce, green onions, sugar, oil, cornstarch, garlic and ginger in small saucepan. Simmer, stirring constantly, until thickened, about 1 minute; cool. Cover and set aside. Slice beef into 1/8-inch-thick strips about 4 inches long and 1 inch wide. Thread onto bamboo or metal skewers keeping meat as flat as possible; brush both sides of beef with sauce. Place skewers on rack of broiler pan; broil to desired degree of doneness. Makes 10 appetizer servings.

Shrimp Bisque

1 pound medium raw shrimp, peeled and deveined
¼ cup butter
2 large green onions, sliced
1 large clove garlic, minced
¼ cup all-purpose flour
1 cup fish stock or chicken broth

3 cups half-and-half

½ teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon grated lemon peel

Dash ground red pepper

2 tablespoons white wine

Coarsely chop shrimp into ½ -inch pieces. Melt butter in large saucepan over medium heat. Cook and stir shrimp, onions and garlic in butter until shrimp turns pink and opaque. Remove from heat. Blend in flour. Cook and stir just until bubbly. Stir in fish stock and cook until bubbly. Cook for 2 minutes, stirring constantly. Remove from heat. Process soup in small batches in food processor or blender until smooth. Return soup to saucepan. Stir in half-and-half, salt, lemon peel, red pepper and wine. Heat through. Garnish with whole cooked shrimp and chopped green onion, if desired. Serves 4.

Mandarin Orange and Red Onion Salad

1 cup sliced almonds

1 tablespoon butter

2 tablespoons lemon juice

1 teaspoon Dijon mustard

½ teaspoon sugar

½ teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon white pepper

1/3 cup vegetable oil

1 head romaine lettuce, torn into pieces

1 (11-ounce) can mandarin orange segments, drained

1 small red onion, thinly sliced into rings

Saute almonds in butter until golden; set aside. Combine lemon juice, mustard, sugar, salt and pepper in a small bowl; whisk in oil. Combine lettuce, oranges, onion and almonds in a salad bowl. Toss with dressing. Serves 6.

Christmas Cabbage Slaw

2 cups shredded green cabbage

2 cups shredded red cabbage

1 cup jicama strips

¼ cup diced red bell pepper

¼ cup thinly sliced green onions

¼ cup vegetable oil

¼ cup lime juice

¾ teaspoon salt

1/8 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

2 tablespoons chopped cilantro leaves

Combine cabbages, jicama, bell pepper and onions in a large bowl. Whisk oil, lime juice, salt and pepper in a small bowl until well blended. Stir in cilantro. Pour over cabbage mixture; toss lightly. Cover and refrigerate 2 to 6 hours for flavors to blend. Serves 6.

Glazed Pork Tenderloin

2 whole pork tenderloins (about 1½ pounds total)

½ cup currant jelly or canned jellied cranberry sauce

1 tablespoon bottled grated horseradish, drained

½ cup chicken broth

¼ cup Rhine or other sweet white wine

Salt and pepper, to taste

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Place tenderloins on meat rack in shallow roasting pan. Combine jelly and horseradish in small saucepan. Heat over low heat until jelly is melted; stir well. Brush half of the mixture over tenderloins. Roast 30 minutes; turn tenderloins over. Brush with remaining jelly mixture. Continue to roast 20 to 30 minutes depending on thickness depending on thickness of tenderloins or until meat thermometer registers 160 degrees. Transfer tenderloins to cutting board; tent with foil. Let stand 10 minutes. Remove meat rack from roasting pan. Pour broth and wine into pan. Place over burner; cook over medium-high heat, stirring frequently and scraping up any browned bits, 4 to 5 minutes or until sauce is reduced to ½ cup. Strain sauce; season to taste with salt and pepper. Carve tenderloins into thin slices. Serve with sauce. Serves 6.

Baked Stuffed Snapper

1 red snapper (1½ pounds)

2 cups hot cooked rice

1 (4-ounce) can sliced mushrooms, drained

½ cup diced water chestnuts

¼ cup thinly sliced green onions

¼ cup diced pimento

2 tablespoons chopped Italian parsley

1 tablespoon finely shredded lemon peel

½ teaspoon salt

1/8 teaspoon pepper

1 tablespoon butter, melted

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Clean and butterfly fish. Combine rice, mushrooms, water chestnuts, onion, pimento, parsley, lemon peel, salt and pepper; toss lightly. Fill cavity of fish with rice mixture; close with wooden toothpicks that have been soaked in water. Place fish in a 9x13x2-inch baking dish coated with nonstick cooking spray; brush fish with melted butter. Bake 18 to 20 minutes or until fish flakes easily with a fork. Wrap any remaining rice in foil and bake in oven with fish. Serves 4.

Mini Morsel Tea Biscuits

4 cups all-purpose flour

1/3 cup sugar

2 tablespoons baking powder

½ teaspoon salt

½ cup cold butter, cut into small pieces

1 cup (6 ounces) semi-sweet chocolate mini morsels

4 eggs, divided

1 cup evaporated milk

1½ teaspoons vanilla extract

2 tablespoons milk

Combine flour, sugar, baking powder and salt in a large bowl. With pastry blender or two knives, cut in butter until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Stir in chocolate morsels. Beat 3 eggs, evaporated milk and vanilla in medium bowl. Add to flour mixture all at once; stir with fork to form a soft dough. Turn dough onto well-floured surface. Knead 6 to 8 times. Pat dough to $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch thickness. Cut with floured 2½-inch biscuit cutter. Transfer to lightly greased baking sheets. Beat remaining egg and milk in small bowl; brush over tea biscuits. Bake in a preheated 400 degree oven for 14 to 16 minutes or until golden brown. Remove to wire racks. Serve warm. Serves 8 to 10.

Grasshopper Pie

2 cups graham cracker crumbs
4 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder
¼ cup butter, melted
1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese, softened
1 cup milk
2 tablespoons green creme de menthe liqueur
2 tablespoons white creme de menthe liqueur
1½ teaspoons vanilla extract
1 (4-ounce) container frozen whipped topping, thawed

Spray 9-inch pie plate with nonstick cooking spray. Combine graham cracker crumbs, cocoa and butter in a medium bowl. Press onto bottom and sides of prepared pie plate. Refrigerate. Beat cream cheese in large bowl with electric mixer until fluffy. Gradually beat in milk until smooth. Stir in both liqueurs and vanilla extract. Fold in whipped topping. Refrigerate for 20 minutes or until chilled but not set. Pour into chilled crust. Freeze for 4 hours or until set. Serves 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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