



Cool weather makes me crave some of my most favorite comfort foods. At the top of the list are pasta and dark chocolate. Imagine a chilly March evening in front of a roaring fire with a glass of Cabernet and a plate loaded with creamy Salmon Romanoff.

All you need to add is a Mixed Greens Salad with Orange-Balsamic Vinaigrette and a slice of crusty Italian bread. Comfort food at its best! For dessert, how about a slice of Double Chocolate Cheesecake? You can use semisweet chocolate morsels when preparing the cheesecake and the ganache topping but I prefer dark chocolate morsels for an even richer and more decadent dessert. Enjoy!

Salmon Romanoff

1 (6-ounce) package extra wide egg noodles

1 cup sour cream

¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese

1 (7.5-ounce) can red salmon, flaked

1 (4-ounce) can sliced mushrooms, drained

3 tablespoons chopped green onion

¼ teaspoon fresh dill weed

1 medium tomato, diced

Cook noodles according to package directions; drain. In a medium saucepan over medium heat, combine sour cream, salmon, mushrooms and green onion. Cook until heated through. Toss with hot pasta. Garnish with dill weed and diced tomato. Serves 2.

Mixed Greens Salad with Orange-Balsamic Vinaigrette

¼ cup orange juice

2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
1 teaspoon sweet hot mustard
1 clove garlic, minced
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
4 cups mixed baby greens
1 tart apple, cored and thinly sliced
½ cup Gorgonzola cheese, crumbled
¼ cup roasted pistachio kernels

For dressing, whisk together orange juice, balsamic vinegar, mustard, and garlic. Gradually whisk in oil until well blended. Set aside to mellow flavors. For salad, divide greens among four salad plates. Top with apple slices. Sprinkle with cheese and nuts. Whisk dressing; drizzle over salads. Serves 2 to 4.

Double Chocolate Cheesecake

For the cheesecake:

18 Oreo cookies
1 (12-ounce) package dark chocolate morsels
3 (8-ounce) packages cream cheese, softened
1 (14-ounce) can sweetened condensed milk
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
4 large eggs

For the ganache:

¾ cup whipping cream
1 (12-ounce) package dark chocolate morsels

Crush cookies to make 1½ cups cookie crumbs. Press cookie crumbs into bottom and halfway up sides of a 9-inch springform pan; set aside. Microwave chocolate morsels in a microwave-safe bowl at high for 1½ minutes or until melted, stirring at 30 second intervals. Beat cream cheese at medium speed with an electric mixer until smooth. Add sweetened condensed milk and vanilla, beating at low speed just until combined. Add eggs, one at a time, beating a low speed just until combined after each addition. Add melted chocolate, beating just until combined. Pour cheesecake batter into prepared crust. Bake in a preheated 300 degree oven for 1 hour and 5 minutes or just until center is set. Turn oven off. Let cheesecake stand in oven for 30 minutes with oven door closed. Remove cheesecake from oven; run a knife along outer edge of cheesecake, and cool in pan on a wire rack until room temperature. Cover and chill 4 hours. Remove sides of springform pan, and place cake on a serving plate. Prepare the ganache by bringing ¾ cup whipping cream to a boil in a saucepan over medium heat; remove from heat and quickly stir in the chocolate morsels until melted and smooth. Let mixture cool until slightly warm (about 30 minutes). Slowly pour and spread warm ganache topping over top of cheesecake, letting it run down sides of cheesecake. Chill 1 hour before serving. Serves 8 to 10.

The writer owns Catering by Debbi Covington and is the author of two cookbooks, 2013 Gold Medal Winner of the Benjamin Franklin Award, 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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