

## **Art of the Holiday Snack**

I love a formal “sit down” meal during the Christmas holidays as much as the next guy but I have a special place in my heart (and stomach) for gatherings that involve one of the great American eating traditions...”snacking” This is by no means a put-down of the culinary traditions of this great country of our’s. In fact, I’ve snacked with *foodies* from more than a few other countries and they enjoyed the experience as much as I did.

When I lived in south Florida I was introduced to the term “noshing” by Jewish friends, many of them originally from New York. The term first showed up in the 1950s and was a Yiddish term created from the German word, *nascheln*, which means to nibble at something. Add some great wines to the nibbling, spice it up with lively conversation over terrific music and a good time will be had by all.

I want to remind you, however, that there is one ground rule that you must observe. You have to be able to enjoy yourself along with everyone else. I can’t tell you to stay out of the kitchen because that’s often where most of the action takes place. Just mentally open yourself up to letting others assist with the process.

If you have an event coming up don’t be shy in requesting that your guests bring along their favorite appetizers. I’ve even recommended that each person bring along copies of the recipe so that the whole event provides each person with new appetizers for their collection.

Here are a few of my favorites and I hope you’ll enjoy them, too!

## **Cheese Straws**



1/2 cup (1 stick) butter, at room temperature  
1 pound sharp Cheddar, shredded, at room temperature  
1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour  
1 teaspoon salt  
1/4 teaspoon ground red pepper  
Preheat the oven to 300 degrees F.

In a mixing bowl, cream the butter until light and fluffy. Add the cheese and mix until blended. Add the flour, salt, and red pepper, and mix to form a dough. Refrigerate for 30 minutes to firm up the dough, then place it in a cookie press, fitted with a ridged tip. Pipe the dough in 2-inch strips onto a lightly greased cookie sheet. Bake for 10 to 15 minutes or until lightly browned. Remove to racks to cool.

I store my cheese straws in decorative tins lined with wax paper. If they are not to be used within a week or so, refrigeration is a good idea.

Dips are also one of my friendly addictions and here are a few to try:

### **Hot Artichoke Dip**

2 cans (not marinated) artichoke hearts, drained and chopped  
1 cup mayonnaise (light, if you like)  
1 cup Parmesan or Pecorino Romano grated cheese  
8 oz. package shredded Mozzarella cheese (lowfat is OK)  
Pinch of onion salt, garlic salt, and ground pepper (to taste)

Mix all ingredients in a 1-quarts casserole dish. Bake at 350°F for 30 minutes until top becomes a golden brown. Serve hot or cold along with good quality crackers, pita chips or lowfat wheat thins.

If time is a problem this dip can be prepared in your microwave oven in about 8 minutes on the high setting. It needs to be stirred every couple of minutes if you use this method. My only hesitation is that you won't get that great browning effect with the microwave.

### **Spiced Pig-in-a-Poke Dip**

Two 8-ounce packs of Philadelphia Cream Cheese  
1 pound breakfast sausage, fried and drained  
1 regular size can of Original Rotelle Chopped Tomatoes & Chili Peppers (use juice and all)

Combine all of the listed ingredients into a crock-pot set on low and allow to heat until the cheese melts and all of the ingredients are well blended. Keep the dip hot while you are serving. We love this one served on the "Scoop" style taco chips.

### **Authentic Guacamole**

I've always loved avocado and have pattered with Guacamole recipes for years. I use several but this one is really special. It takes a bit more preparation but the results are worth it. Be sure to use "ripe" avocados along with a really nice Mexican corn chip. Take the time to warm the chips up in your oven before serving.

15 ripe medium California avocados, seeded and scooped out of the peel  
1 large sweet onion, chopped  
3 crushed Garlic cloves  
2 firm tomatoes, diced  
1 pound Monterey Jack cheese, grated  
5 Green chilies, diced  
1 cup fresh Cilantro, finely chopped  
½ cup fresh lime juice  
1 tablespoon Lawry's seasoned salt

In a large mixing bowl, coarsely mash avocados, leaving some chunks. Add remaining ingredients and mix to blend. Chill for 20 minutes or so to allow the ingredients to marry properly. When storing guacamole place a piece of plastic wrap directly on the surface to slow oxidation and discoloration. Keep in the refrigerator and use within a few days.

As I mentioned earlier, when we celebrate we love to serve a really good wine to our guests. The fine staff at Martin & Weyrich Winery in Paso Robles, California, has created a selection that fits the bill for almost every wine lover.

The 2004 Moscato Allegro is a zesty, lightly spicy white wine that is made in the festive tradition of Moscato di Asti in Italy's Piedmont region. It is vibrant and delicious with a spritzig quality, which means it is lightly effervescent. The flavors of mild tropical fruits, ripe pears and hints of melon come through beautifully along with a fresh, snappy fruit acidity. I first labeled it the perfect hot tub wine but have found it a superb selection to renew your palate with each sip allowing you to really experience the varied tastes of an assorted selection of foods.

As we love to talk to our friends out there we remind you that your questions and comments are always warmly welcomed at 888-288-0668 or you can reach us online at [www.winedog.com](http://www.winedog.com). Be safe as you enjoy this holiday. Cheers.