

Let the Party Begin!

Are you excited yet?! Have you started putting aside the “must do” chores like shopping and card writing that you feel you have to do to prepare for the holiday? Not yet, huh?

May I suggest that you take a deep breath, even if just for a moment, and begin to think pleasant thoughts...your own “zen” moment. Think about seeing friends and those wonderful smells that come out of the kitchen before a great holiday feast. Imagine the look on a child’s face as they walk up to the Christmas tree and stare in wide-eyed wonder at the heap of bright, festive gifts...treasures beyond imagination. Now you’re starting to get the idea.

No matter what form your celebration takes it will almost always involve good food; that’s just the way it is. You may be visiting a friend’s home, entertaining family and friends yourself or taking time to fellowship at your church. The possibilities are endless but count on there being food.

I love the big, fancy meals we enjoy during the fall holidays but some of my best memories are of gatherings filled with laughter, conversation, great wines and appetizers. Everyone I talk to has favorite appetizer recipes; that’s how I’ve gotten many of my own favorites. You taste, you praise, you ask for the recipe.

Here are a few of the hits I’ve gathered over the years. When I make them and share them with others, I can’t help but think of the person I got the recipe from and smile. What a great bonus!

Arlene’s Beef Log

1 or more Kosher Beef Summer Sausage
Apricot jam
Mini rye bread
Hot, spicy mustard (Mr. Mustard is great!)

Preheat oven to 275° F.

Slice summer sausage not quite through (to within ¼ inch of bottom) so that you will have a slinky type effect. Slices should be about ¼ inch thick. Cover the sausage with lots of jam being sure to get it into the slices. Wrap the whole thing in foil and place in oven for 3 hours or longer. Be sure to open the top of the foil for the last 45 minutes or so to brown everything nicely.

To serve, slice all the way through and place on mini rye slices with hot mustard. You need to taste this one to believe it. Sounds simple and it is but the taste is wonderful!

I hope you enjoy salmon, as this next recipe is another winner. It calls for canned salmon in the recipe but I will usually get a small fillet and bake it until it flakes nicely. I think it’s worth the extra effort.

Bubbi’s Salmon Dip

1 large can of good quality “red” salmon (pink is cheaper but just not as good), remove skin
1 8 oz. brick of cream cheese, softened to room temperature

½ teaspoon Old Bay Seasoning
3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
2 tablespoons dehydrated minced onion flakes
½ teaspoon dried dill weed

Flake salmon apart, removing any traces of skin or bones you may find. Mix remaining ingredients into salmon by hand until smooth. Taste before refrigerating to adjust seasonings to your personal preference and refrigerate for at least one hour. Just before serving sprinkle a little dried dill on top for garnish and serve on your favorite flat bread or cracker. We really like this with Triscuits or the Carr's cracked wheat cracker.

With the great access we now have at almost every supermarket to all of the best ingredients to prepare traditional Mexican dishes this one is fun and keeps the conversation lively in the kitchen during prep, which should be done right before serving. Feliz Navidad!

Griddle-baked Quesadillas

Serves 6

This recipe is kept fairly basic; however don't be shy about adding thin strips of cooked beef, pork or chicken. I've prepared quesadillas with shrimp and they're great!

1 small white onion, halved, thinly sliced and sautéed in vegetable oil ahead of time
add 1 ½ cups roasted pepper strips (poblano, Anaheim, or canned roasted green chili peppers work fine) until just warm as you're finishing up the onion
¼ teaspoon salt, or to taste
2 cups grated Mexican Chihuahua, Monterey Jack, or brick cheese
6 four tortillas

Very lightly oil a griddle and heat it to medium. Place as many tortillas as can fit in a single layer on the hot griddle. Top each tortilla with 1/3 cup of the cheese and about 2 tablespoons of the roasted pepper and onion mixture. Heat on the griddle until the cheese just begins to melt, about 1 minute, and then fold the tortillas in half. Continue heating until crispy on both sides, another minute or two.

These should be served immediately with sides such as salsa, Guacamole and sour cream.

When it comes to parties great sparkling wines or Champagnes are a natural choice. They're festive and combine really well with finger foods. Lately, we've been tasting some new offerings and have discovered some really great choices to match many taste preferences.

In the dry category, if you've never enjoyed the Jordan Winery's sparkling you are in for a real treat. Simply called "J", this bubbly is light, just barely toasty, and has a creamy texture. I might also mention that the wine is beautifully packaged...very classy. Our favorite pick from Champagne is the special bottling from Duval-Leroy called Paris with a captivating bottle designed by Le Roy Neiman. The Champagne has a pleasantly mild yeasty character, a round, voluptuous style and is very clean in the finish. Both are great choices.

If your taste is more for a fruitier style sparkling, we were really pleased with the Clarté 2003 Moscato d'Asti by Italian producer Elio Perrone. The Moscato grape provides so much more than just fruitiness. The spicy nature of the taste along with a captivating nose of wild flowers makes this selection fun to enjoy and rather surprising if you've never experienced anything like it.

Wishing you a wonderful holiday season filled full of joy and fun! Call us if we can be of assistance (888-288-0668) and always remember to enjoy yourself responsibly...keep it off the roads!