

'Tis the season for gatherings with family and friends. And you know what that means.... there will be food. This week, we have put together some recipes for a nice meal.

If you have a recipe to share, please submit to ads@thedrummer.com.

Roast Pork Loin

Level: Easy

Total: 1 hr 35 min (includes resting time)

Active: 20 min

Yield: 6 to 8 servings

2 T. Dijon mustard
1 T. fresh thyme leaves, chopped
1 (3 to 3-1/2 lb.) boneless pork loin roast (remove the string if your roast has been tied)
Kosher salt & freshly ground black pepper
1 T. vegetable oil
2 med. red onions, each cut through the core into 8 intact wedges
2 c. hard apple cider
1 (7 oz.) bag mixed dried fruit or 1/4 c. each dried apples, dried apricots, dried pears, prunes & golden raisins

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. Stir together the mustard and thyme in a small bowl. Season the pork roast all over with a generous amount of salt and pepper, then rub the top with the mustard-thyme mixture (leave the bottom and sides bare).

Heat the oil in a large, ovenproof skillet over medium-high heat. Add the onions and cook, undisturbed, until dark golden brown in spots, about 2 minutes. Turn the onion wedges over and cook for 2 minutes more. Pour in the cider, stirring to scrape up any bits stuck to the bottom of the skillet. Scatter the dried fruit evenly in the skillet and remove from the heat.

Put the roast in the skillet mustard-side up, then bake until an instant-read thermometer inserted in the middle of the roast reads 145 to 150 degrees F, about 1 hour (the roast will continue cooking once you remove it from the oven). Transfer the roast to a cutting board, tent with foil and let rest for 15 minutes.

Cut the roast into 1/2-inch-thick slices. Season the pan sauce, onions and dried fruit with salt and pepper and serve with the pork.

Christmas Stuffing with Bacon

Level: Easy

Total: 1 hr 40 min

Prep: 30 min

Inactive: 10 min

Cook: 1 hr

Yield: 8 to 10 servings

8 oz. applewood-smoked bacon, chopped into 1/2" pcs.

Rice:

4-1/2 c. low-salt chicken broth
3 T. chopped fresh thyme
1-1/4 c. short-grain brown rice
1-1/4 c. wild rice

Vegetables:

2 T. unsalted butter, at room temp.
2 T. extra-virgin olive oil
1 (14 oz.) bag frozen pearl onions, thawed
1 tsp. kosher salt
3/4 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
12 oz. (3 large) portobello mushrooms, shredded or thinly sliced
8 oz. Brussels sprouts, trimmed & thinly sliced
1/2 c. hazelnuts, toasted, husked, coarsely chopped, opt.

Cook the bacon in a large skillet over medium heat until crisp, 8 to 10 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, drain the bacon on paper towels.

For the rice: In a heavy saucepan or Dutch oven, bring the broth and thyme to a boil over medium-high heat. Add the brown and wild rice. Cover the saucepan and simmer until the rice is tender but still chewy, 30 minutes. Turn off the heat and allow the rice to stand for 10 minutes. Fluff with a fork.

For the vegetables: In the same skillet used to cook the bacon, heat the butter and oil over medium-high heat. Add the onions and season with 1/2 teaspoon salt and 1/4 teaspoon pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally until light golden, about 5 minutes. Add the mushrooms, 1/4 teaspoon salt and 1/4 teaspoon pepper. Cook until softened, about 8 minutes. Add the Brussels sprouts and the remaining 1/4 teaspoon salt and 1/4 teaspoon pepper. Cook for 5 minutes.

Transfer the vegetable mixture to the saucepan of cooked rice. Add the hazelnuts and cooked bacon. Toss until all the ingredients are mixed. Transfer to a large bowl and serve.

Cook's Note: The rice can also be cooked in 4 cups of broth and 1/2 cup of water. To toast the hazelnuts, arrange in a single layer on a baking sheet. Bake in a preheated 350 degrees F oven until lightly toasted, 8 to 10 minutes. Cool completely before using.

Garlic Grits Casserole

Level: Easy
Total: 1 hr 15 min
Active: 25 min
Yield: 8 to 10 servings

1 c. quick-cooking grits
4-1/2 c. boiling water
1 tsp. salt
10 oz. herb-and-garlic cheese, such as Boursin
1/4 c. (1/2 stick) salted butter
2 med. eggs
1/2 c. milk
1 T. salted butter, melted
1 c. crushed cornflakes

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Grease a 9-by-12-by-2-inch casserole dish.

Cook the grits in the boiling water with the salt until thickened, about 5 minutes. Add the cheese and butter to the hot grits and stir until melted and incorporated. Beat the eggs and add the milk to the beaten eggs. Slowly stir the egg mixture into the grits. Pour the mixture into the prepared dish. Pour the melted butter over the cornflakes and stir to distribute the butter. Sprinkle the crumb mixture on top of the grits. Bake for 45 minutes.

Savory Roasted Carrots with Mushrooms

Prep: 10 min.
Bake: 40 min.
Yield: 4 servings

1 lb. fresh baby carrots
1 med. onion, cut into small wedges
1/2 lb. small fresh mushrooms
1/4 c. butter, melted
2 T. Worcestershire sauce
2 garlic cloves, minced
1/4 to 1/2 tsp. salt
1/4 tsp. pepper

Preheat oven to 425°. Place carrots, onion and mushrooms in a greased 15x10x1-in. baking pan. In a small bowl, mix remaining ingredients; drizzle over vegetables and toss to coat. Roast 40-45 minutes or until carrots are tender, stirring occasionally.

Roasted Apple Salad with Spicy Maple-Cider Vinaigrette

Prep Time: 15 min.
Bake Time: 20 min. + cooling
Yield: 8 servings

4 med. Fuji, Gala or other firm apples, quartered
2 T. olive oil

Dressing:

2 T. cider vinegar
2 T. olive oil
1 T. maple syrup
1 tsp. Sriracha chili sauce
1/2 tsp. salt
1/4 tsp. pepper

Salad:

1 pkg. (5 oz.) spring mix salad greens
4 pitted dates, quartered
1 log (4 oz.) fresh goat cheese, crumbled
1/2 c. chopped pecans, toasted

Preheat oven to 375°. Place apples in a foil-lined 15x10x1-in. baking pan; drizzle with oil and toss to coat. Roast 20-30 minutes or until tender, stirring occasionally. Cool completely.

In a small bowl, whisk dressing ingredients until blended. In a large bowl, combine salad greens and dates. Drizzle dressing over salad and toss to coat. Divide mixture among 8 plates. Top with goat cheese and roasted apples; sprinkle with pecans. Serve immediately.

Chocolate Almond Cake with Sugared Cranberries

Level: Intermediate
Total: 4 hr
Prep: 1 hr

Inactive: 2 hr 25 min
Cook: 35 min
Yield: 10 to 12 servings

For the sugared cranberries:

1-1/2 c. granulated sugar
2 c. cranberries, thawed if frozen
1/2 tsp. ground cardamom

For the cake:

Nonstick cooking spray
2 c. all-purpose flour
1/2 c. almond flour
1-1/2 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. baking soda
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. ground allspice
1/2 tsp. ground cardamom
3/4 cup unsweetened Dutch-process cocoa powder
3 lg. e eggs
2 c. granulated sugar
1 c. buttermilk
1/2 c. vegetable oil
2 tsp. pure vanilla extract

For the frosting:

4 sticks unsalted butter, at room temp.
6 c. confectioners' sugar
1 tsp. salt
1 T. pure vanilla extract
1 tsp. pure almond extract
2 T. milk
2 T. almond liqueur, such as Amaretto (or use more milk)

Make the sugared cranberries: Bring 3/4 cup granulated sugar and 3/4 cup water to a simmer in a medium saucepan. Cook, stirring, until the sugar dissolves, about 2 minutes. Put the cranberries in a large bowl and pour the sugar syrup over them; let sit 1 hour. Whisk the remaining 3/4 cup granulated sugar with the cardamom in a large bowl. Drain the cranberries, add to the spiced sugar and toss to coat. Spread the cranberries and sugar on a rimmed baking sheet. Let sit, rerolling the cranberries in the sugar occasionally until dry, 2 to 3 hours.

Meanwhile, make the cake: Preheat the oven to 325 degrees F. Coat two 9-inch round cake pans with cooking spray and line the bottoms with parchment paper. Coat the parchment with cooking spray. Whisk the all-purpose flour, almond flour, baking powder, baking soda, salt, allspice and cardamom in a large bowl; set aside. Put the cocoa powder in a separate large bowl. Heat 1 cup water in a small saucepan until almost simmering; pour over the cocoa powder and whisk until smooth. Set aside until slightly cooled, about 10 minutes.

Add the eggs to the cocoa mixture and beat with a mixer on medium-high speed until just combined. Add the granulated sugar, buttermilk, vegetable oil and vanilla; beat until combined. Reduce the mixer speed to low; gradually add the flour mixture, then increase the speed to medium and beat until smooth, about 1 minute. Divide the batter evenly between the cake pans; lightly tap on the counter to remove any air bubbles. Bake until a toothpick inserted into the centers comes out clean, 30 to 35 minutes. Transfer to a rack and let cool 10 minutes in the pans, then invert the cakes onto the rack to cool completely. Remove the parchment. (The cake layers can be made 1 day ahead; let cool, then wrap tightly in plastic wrap.)

Make the frosting: Beat the butter, confectioners' sugar and salt in a large bowl with a mixer on medium speed until just combined. Add the vanilla and almond extracts; increase the mixer speed to high and beat, scraping down the side of the bowl, until creamy, about 3 minutes. Add the milk and almond liqueur; beat until light and fluffy, 1 to 2 more minutes.

Halve 1/2 cup of the sugared cranberries. Place one cake layer on a plate or cake stand. Spread with 1 cup frosting, then sprinkle with the halved cranberries. Top with the second cake layer. Cover the top and sides of the cake with the remaining frosting. Top with the remaining sugared cranberries.

CORRECTION

Old-Fashioned Pumpkin Cookies

2-1/2 c. flour
1 tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. cinnamon
1/2 tsp. nutmeg
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 c. butter (1 stick)
1 cup pumpkin (100% pure)
1 lg. egg
1 tsp. vanilla
1-1/2 c. sugar

Cream Cheese Frosting:

1/2 stick butter, room temp.

1 tsp. vanilla
4 c. powdered sugar
1 (8 oz.) pkg. cream cheese, room temp.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a medium-size bowl, combine the flour, baking soda, baking powder, cinnamon, nutmeg and salt. In a separate large bowl, mix the butter and sugar until blended; add pumpkin, egg, vanilla and mix until batter is smooth. Slowly add flour mixture to pumpkin batter, until well blended. Drop rounded tablespoon-size cookie dough on baking sheet. Bake until edge of cookie is slightly golden brown, 15-18 minutes. Cool completely before frosting. For frosting, mix all ingredients until smooth and spreadable consistency.

Quote of the Week:

“I would maintain that thanks are the highest form of thought, and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder.”

~ G. K. Chesterton