

Lent is here, and we are always looking for a good family “Lent-Friendly” meal to prepare. This week, we will feature some great ideas to help keep your menu exciting and fresh. No desserts this week - watch next week’s column for an all-desserts edition!

Pesto Flatbread

Prep Time: 20 min.

Cook Time: 20 min.

Servings: 8

1 loaf (1 lb.) frozen bread dough, thawed
1/2 C. shredded parmesan cheese, divided
1/2 tsp. dried basil
1/2 tsp. dried oregano
1/4 C. prepared pesto
1 C. sliced fresh mushrooms
1 C. shredded part-skim mozzarella cheese

Preheat oven to 425°. Place dough on a lightly floured surface; let rest for 10 min. Knead in 1/4 C. cheese, basil and the oregano. Roll into a 12-in. circle; place on a greased 14-in. pizza pan. Prick with a fork. Bake 10 min.

Spread pesto over crust. Sprinkle with mushrooms, mozzarella cheese and the remaining parmesan cheese. Bake pizza until golden brown, 8-10 min. longer.

Fish and Chips Salad

Prep Time: 10 min.

Total Time: 40 min.

Servings: 4-6

Fish and Chips:

Olive oil cooking spray
1 (24.5-oz.) package frozen battered fish portions
14 oz. frozen french fries
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. ground black pepper
1/2 tsp. paprika

Pickled onions:

1/2 med. red onion, thinly sliced
1/2 C. malt vinegar
1/2 C. water
1 tsp. granulated sugar
1/4 tsp. salt

Tartar sauce dressing:

1/2 C. mayonnaise
2 T. malt vinegar
2 T. water
2 tsp. pickle relish

To serve:

1-1/2 C. cooked English peas
12 C. butter lettuce
Lemon wedges

Note: a reasonable substitute for malt vinegar is apple cider vinegar.

Preheat oven to 425°F. Spray two rimmed baking sheets with olive oil cooking spray.

Fish and chips: Arrange fish in an even layer on one pan, spacing evenly. Arrange fries on the other pan in an even layer. Spray fish and fries with cooking spray. Combine salt, pepper, and paprika in a small bowl; sprinkle fish and fries evenly with half of the seasoning mixture.

Place the fries on the bottom rack, and the fish on the top rack. Bake for 15 min. Remove pans from oven. Flip fish, and toss fries; spray with cooking spray again, and sprinkle with remaining seasoning mixture. Return pans to oven in the same positions. Bake until golden and crispy, about 10 min. more.

Pickled onions: Meanwhile, combine the sliced red onion, malt vinegar, water, sugar, and salt in a small microwave-safe bowl. Microwave until steaming, 3 min. Let cool 10 min.

Dressing: Whisk together the mayonnaise, malt vinegar, water, and pickle relish until combined.

To serve: Add the greens to a large bowl; add the pickled onions and 1/4 C. of the pickling liquid; toss to combine. Divide lettuce evenly among serving bowls. Sprinkle fries and cooked peas evenly over the bowls; top each bowl with 2 to 3 pieces of fish. Drizzle the salads with dressing. Serve with lemon wedges.

Vegetarian Chili Mac

Prep Time: 15 min.

Cook Time: 25 min.
Servings: 8

1 lg. onion, chopped
1 med. green pepper, chopped
1 T. olive oil
1 garlic clove, minced
2 C. water
1-1/2 C. uncooked elbow macaroni
1 can (16 oz.) mild chili beans, undrained
1 can (15-1/2 oz.) great northern beans, rinsed and drained
1 can (14-1/2 oz.) diced tomatoes, undrained
1 can (8 oz.) tomato sauce
4 tsp. chili powder
1 tsp. ground cumin
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 C. fat-free sour cream

In a Dutch oven, saute onion and green pepper in oil until tender. Add garlic; cook 1 min. longer. Stir in the water, macaroni, beans, tomatoes, tomato sauce, chili powder, cumin and salt.

Bring to a boil. Reduce heat; cover and simmer for 15-20 min. or until macaroni is tender. Top each serving with 1 tablespoon sour cream.

Veggie-Cashew Stir-Fry

Prep Time: 20 min.
Cook Time: 15 min.
Servings: 4

1/4 C. soy sauce
1/4 C. water
2 T. brown sugar
2 T. lemon juice
2 T. olive oil
1 garlic clove, minced
2 C. sliced fresh mushrooms
1 C. coarsely chopped fresh baby carrots
1 sm. zucchini, cut into 1/4-inch slices
1 sm. sweet red pepper, coarsely chopped
1 sm. green pepper, coarsely chopped
4 green onions, sliced
2 C. cooked brown rice
1 can (8 oz.) sliced water chestnuts, drained
1/2 C. honey-roasted cashews

In a small bowl, mix soy sauce, water, brown sugar and lemon juice until smooth; set aside.

In a large skillet, heat oil over medium-high heat. Stir-fry garlic for 1 min. Add vegetables; cook until vegetables are crisp-tender, 6-8 min.

Stir soy sauce mixture and add to pan. Bring to a boil. Add rice and water chestnuts; heat through. Top with cashews.

Ravioli Casserole

Prep Time: 10 min.
Cook Time: 30 min.
Servings: 8

1 pkg. (20 oz.) refrigerated cheese ravioli
3-1/2 C. pasta sauce
2 C. small-curd 4% cottage cheese
4 C. shredded mozzarella cheese
1/4 C. grated parmesan cheese
Minced fresh parsley, optional

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Prepare ravioli according to package directions; drain. Spread 1 C. pasta sauce in an ungreased 13x9-in. baking dish. Layer with half the ravioli, 1-1/4 C. sauce, 1 C. cottage cheese and 2 C. mozzarella cheese. Repeat layers. Sprinkle with parmesan cheese.

Bake, uncovered, until bubbly, 30-40 min.. Let stand 5-10 min. before serving. If desired, sprinkle with parsley.

Cracker-Crusted Cod with Green Beans

Prep Time: 35 min.
Total Time: 50 min.
Servings: 6

2 lb. green beans, trimmed
3 T. olive oil, plus more for the baking sheet

1-1/2 tsp. kosher salt
1/2 tsp. black pepper
3 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
1/2 C. butter crackers, finely crushed cracker crumbs, (such as Ritz®)
3 T. grated parmesan cheese
1/4 tsp. paprika
3 Tbsp. mayonnaise
1 tsp. Dijon mustard
6 (5- 6 oz.) skinless cod fillets
Chopped fresh parsley and lemon wedges, for serving

Position racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven and preheat to 450°. Line 2 baking sheets with foil. Toss the green beans, 2 T. olive oil, 1 tsp. salt and the pepper on one baking sheet. Brush some olive oil on the second baking sheet.

Roast the green beans on the lower oven rack until starting to brown and soften, 10 to 15 min. Add the garlic and toss. Continue roasting until the garlic is soft and the green beans are lightly charred, 15 to 20 more min.

Meanwhile, combine the cracker crumbs, parmesan, paprika and remaining 1 T. olive oil in a shallow bowl, tossing to coat the crumbs with oil. Stir the mayonnaise and mustard together in a small bowl. Lay the fish on the oiled baking sheet. Spread the mayonnaise mixture over the fish, then press the fish into the crumbs to coat. Press any remaining crumbs onto the fish once they are all coated. Return the fish to the baking sheet, crumb-side up.

Roast the fish on the upper oven rack until just cooked through, about 15 min. Turn on the broiler and broil until the crumbs are browned and crisp, about 2 more min. Serve the fish with the green beans. Sprinkle with parsley and serve with lemon wedges.

Easy Spaghetti Squash Alfredo

Prep Time: 20 min.

Cook Time: 1 hr.

Servings: 4

Squash:

1 med. spaghetti squash (about 4 lbs.)
2 tsp. olive oil
Salt and pepper, to taste

Alfredo:

8 T. butter, divided
1 garlic clove, minced
1-1/2 C. heavy whipping cream
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. dried sage leaves
1/4 tsp. pepper
2 C. grated parmesan cheese, divided
1/4 C. sprigs fresh parsley, stems removed, chopped

Preheat oven to 350°. Line a 15x10x1-in. baking sheet with parchment paper or foil.

Slice a spaghetti squash in half lengthwise; scoop out and discard stringy seeds. Brush cut surfaces of squash halves with olive oil. Sprinkle with salt and pepper; place the squash halves cut side down on the prepared baking sheet. Roast 50-60 min. or until the skin is easy to pierce with a fork. Let slightly cool. Use a fork to gently scrape out spaghetti squash strands; transfer to a large bowl. Place squash shells back on baking sheet for later use.

Melt 4 T. cubed butter in a large, heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium heat. As the butter begins to simmer and foam, stir it gently to keep the milk solids from sticking to the bottom. Simmer; stir a few minutes longer until the butter turns a golden brown color, 3-4 min. Remove from heat; add remaining 4 T. cubed butter and minced garlic. Stir until butter is melted. Pour in cream; return the pan to the burner over medium heat. Stir in salt, sage, if desired, and pepper. Bring to a simmer; stir the sauce constantly and simmer about 6 min., until it's smooth and slightly thickened. Remove from heat. Add in 1-1/2 C. of grated parmesan and stir until melted and sauce is smooth.

Pour a small amount of alfredo sauce in with the spaghetti squash; use two forks or tongs to turn and coat the squash noodles. Continue to slowly add Alfredo and toss the noodles until coated and saucy. Divide spaghetti squash alfredo in reserved squash shells. Sprinkle with remaining grated parmesan. Place the pan under a broiler set to high; broil 2-3 min. until the cheese on top is bubbly and browned. Remove from the oven; sprinkle with chopped parsley. Serve immediately.

Quote of the Week:

“Happy Spring! Let’s start the season with a morning frost and an afternoon sunburn.” ~ Anonymous