

'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, from beverage to dessert.

If you have a favorite recipe, send it in! Recipes, with photo (and a short story/history), if available, can be submitted to ads@thedrummer.com.

Festive Snow Punch

Prep Time: 15 min.

Yield: 10 servings

1 c. freshly squeezed lemon juice
5 med. ripe bananas
3/4 c. granulated sugar; superfine if possible
2 c. half-and-half
1 liter lemon-lime soda
1/2 gal. vanilla ice cream or frozen yogurt

Optional Rim:

1/2 c. sweetened shredded coconut
Canned vanilla icing or corn syrup

Place lemon juice, bananas and sugar in a blender, cover and mix until smooth. Add half-and-half, cover and blend until smooth. Cover and refrigerate up to 1 hour.

Just before serving, pour lemon/banana mixture into a punch bowl. Stir in soda and top with scoops of ice cream.

Optional, but oh, so pretty; dip the rims of the glasses in corn syrup or vanilla icing then dip the coated rims in coconut.

Bacon and Fontina Stuffed Mushrooms

Prep Time: 30 min.

Bake Time: 10 min.

Yield: 2 dozen

4 oz. cream cheese, softened
1 c. shredded fontina cheese
8 bacon strips, cooked & crumbled
4 green onions, chopped
1/4 c. chopped oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes
3 T. minced fresh parsley
24 lg. fresh mushrooms (about 1-1/4 lbs.), stems removed
1 T. olive oil

Preheat oven to 425°. In a small bowl, mix the first six ingredients until blended. Arrange mushroom caps in a greased 15x10x1-in. baking pan, stem side up. Spoon about 1 tablespoon filling into each.

Drizzle tops with oil. Bake, uncovered, 9-11 minutes or until golden brown and mushrooms are tender.

Perfect Winter Salad

Prep/Total Time: 20 min.

Yield: 12 servings

1/4 c. reduced-fat mayonnaise
1/4 c. maple syrup
3 T. white wine vinegar
2 T. minced shallot
2 tsp. sugar
1/2 c. canola oil
2 pkgs. (5 oz. each) spring mix salad greens
2 med. tart apples, thinly sliced
1 c. dried cherries
1 c. pecan halves
1/4 c. thinly sliced red onion

In a small bowl, mix first 5 ingredients; gradually whisk in oil until blended. Refrigerate, covered, until serving.

To serve, place remaining ingredients in a large bowl; toss with dressing.

Peppery Roast Beef

Prep Time: 15 min.

Bake Time: 2-1/2 hours + standing time

Yield: 12 servings

1 T. olive oil
1 T. seasoned pepper
2 garlic cloves, minced
1/2 tsp. dried thyme
1/4 tsp. salt
1 boneless beef eye round or top round roast (4 to 5 lbs.)

Horseradish Sauce:

1 c. sour cream
2 T. lemon juice
2 T. milk
2 T. prepared horseradish
1 T. Dijon mustard
1/4 tsp. salt
1/8 tsp. pepper

Preheat oven to 325°. In a small bowl, combine the oil, seasoned pepper, garlic, thyme and salt; rub over roast. Place fat side up on a rack in a shallow roasting pan.

Bake, uncovered, 2-1/2 to 3 hours or until meat reaches desired doneness (for medium-rare, a thermometer should read 135°; medium, 140°; medium-well, 145°). Let stand for 10 minutes before slicing.

In a small bowl, combine the sauce ingredients. Serve with roast.

Toasted Spiced Ham Drizzled in Honey

Level: Intermediate
Total: 1 hr 35 min
Prep: 20 min
Inactive: 15 min
Cook: 1 hr
Yield: 6 to 8 servings

1 boneless country ham
2 c. honey, for glazing ham
2 T. Toasted Spice Rub, recipe follows
1 T. thyme, chopped fine
6 celery stalks

Toasted Spice Rub:

1/4 c. fennel seeds
1 T. coriander seeds
1 T. peppercorns
1-1/2 tsp. red pepper flakes
1/4 c. (1 oz.) sweet chili powder
2 T. kosher salt
2 T. ground cinnamon

Preheat oven to 425 degrees F.

Place ham on an open brown paper bag for easy clean up. With the tip of a paring knife carefully score a 1-inch grid pattern around the outside of the ham. Brush the entire surface of the meat on all sides with some of the honey.

Season the entire surface of the meat on all sides with the toasted spice rub and thyme. Add about a half cup of water to the base of the roaster. Place ham on several celery sticks in the roasting pan.

Cook for 1 hour. Every 15 minutes, baste ham with juices that collect in the base of the roaster and the honey. Let rest for 15 minutes before carving as desired.

Toasted Spice Rub: Toast the fennel seeds, coriander seeds, and peppercorns in a small, heavy pan over medium heat. (Toasting freshens spices, releases their oils, and makes them more fragrant, as well as adding a new dimension of flavor.) When the fennel turns light brown, work quickly. Turn on the exhaust fan; add the red pepper flakes, and toss, toss, toss, always under the fan. Immediately turn the spice mixture out onto a plate to cool. Put in a blender with the sweet chili powder, salt, and cinnamon and blend until the spices are evenly ground.

If you have a small spice mill blender or a coffee grinder dedicated to grinding spices, grind only the fennel, coriander, pepper, and chili flakes. Pour into a bowl and toss with the remaining ingredients. Keep the spice mix in a glass jar in a cool, dry place, or freeze. Yield: 1 cup

Twice-Baked Cheddar Potato Casserole

Prep Time: 70 min.
Bake Time: 15 min.
Yield: 12 servings

8 med. baking potatoes (about 8 oz. each)
1/2 c. butter, cubed
2/3 c. sour cream
2/3 c. 2% milk
1 tsp. salt
3/4 tsp. pepper

10 bacon strips, cooked & crumbled, divided
2 c. shredded cheddar cheese, divided
4 green onions, chopped, divided

Preheat oven to 425°. Scrub potatoes; pierce several times with a fork. Bake until tender, 45-60 minutes. Remove from oven; reduce oven setting to 350°.

When potatoes are cool enough to handle, cut each potato lengthwise in half. Scoop out pulp and place in a large bowl; discard shells. Mash pulp with butter; stir in sour cream, milk, salt and pepper.

Reserve 1/4 cup crumbled bacon for topping. Gently fold remaining bacon, 1 cup cheese and half the green onions into potato mixture (do not overmix).

Transfer to a greased 11x7-in. baking dish. Top with the remaining cheese and green onions; sprinkle with reserved bacon. Bake until heated through and cheese is melted, 15-20 minutes.

Green Bean Bundles

Prep/Total Time: 25 min.

Yield: 8 servings

1 lb. fresh green beans, trimmed
8 bacon strips, partially cooked
1 T. finely chopped onion
3 T. butter
1 T. white wine vinegar
1 T. sugar
1/4 tsp. salt

Cook the beans until crisp-tender. Wrap about 10 beans in each bacon strip; secure with a toothpick. Place on a foil-covered baking sheet. Bake at 400° until bacon is done, 10-15 minutes.

In a skillet, saute onion in butter until tender. Add vinegar, sugar and salt; heat through. Remove bundles to a serving bowl or platter; pour sauce over and serve immediately.

Thyme-Roasted Carrots

Prep/Total Time: 30 min.

Yield: about 12 servings

(2 carrot halves each)

3 lbs. med. carrots, halved lengthwise
2 T. minced fresh thyme or 2 tsp. dried thyme
2 T. canola oil
1 T. honey
1 tsp. salt

Preheat oven to 400°. Divide carrots between 2 greased 15x10x1-in. baking pans. In a small bowl, mix thyme, oil, honey and salt; brush over carrots. Roast 20-25 minutes or until tender.

Christmas Reindeer Brownies

Level: Easy

Total: 2 hr 50 min

(includes cooling time)

Active: 1 hr 10 min

Yield: 16 brownies

1 c. (2 sticks) unsalted butter, melted & cooled, plus more for greasing the pans
1-1/2 c. sugar
1 tsp. vanilla extract
3 lg. eggs
1 c. all-purpose flour (see Cook's Note)
1/2 c. unsweetened cocoa powder
1 tsp. fine salt
1/2 tsp. baking powder
2 c. regular semisweet chocolate chips (about 12 oz.)
16 sm. chocolate-flavored candy chews, such as Tootsie Rolls
16 red or brown candy-coated chocolates, such as M&M's
16 mini vanilla wafer cookies
16 mini marshmallows
32 mini semisweet chocolate chips (about 1 tsp.)
32 mini peppermint candy canes (about 2-1/2 inches long)

Special equipment: two 8-inch round cake pans

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Butter the bottom and sides of two 8-inch round cake pans. Cut two 8-inch circles out of parchment paper and line the bottoms of the cake pans with the parchment.

Stir together the butter, sugar, vanilla and eggs in a medium bowl. In another bowl, whisk together the flour, cocoa powder, salt and baking powder. Add the dry ingredients to the wet ingredients and stir until just combined. Stir in 1 cup of the regular chocolate chips and divide the batter between the prepared pans, smoothing the tops. Bake until a crust begins to form around the edges, the edges pull away from the pan and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean, 35 to 40 minutes.

Meanwhile, halve the candy chews lengthwise. Use your fingers to shape each half into a teardrop shape for the reindeer's ears and set aside. Melt 2 tablespoons of the remaining regular chocolate chips in a heat-proof bowl in a microwave in 20 second intervals.

Use a dab of the melted chocolate to stick a red candy-coated chocolate onto each of the vanilla wafers to make noses and set aside.

Cut each mini marshmallow in half crosswise. Insert one mini chocolate chip, pointed-side down, into the flat, cut side of each marshmallow piece to make eyes and set aside.

As soon as the brownies come out of the oven, sprinkle the top of each brownie round evenly with half of the remaining regular chocolate chips (7 tablespoons each) and let stand until the chips melt, about 5 minutes. Spread the chocolate evenly over the top of the brownies with a spatula.

Let the brownies cool fully in the pans on cooling racks, about 1 hour. Cut each circle into 8 equal triangles with a knife. Use a small offset spatula or pie server to lift each triangle out of the pan.

To assemble: Arrange the brownies so that the longest, sharpest point faces you and gently press a cookie-nose on that point of each brownie. To make antlers: Using the tip of a paring knife or a skewer, poke two small holes in the top side of each brownie, about 1/2 inch from the corners, and insert a mini candy cane in each hole.

For the ears, press a piece of candy chew on each corner below the candy cane antlers.

Press 2 of the mini marshmallow eyes next to each other in the center of each brownie.

Cook's Note: When measuring flour, we spoon it into a dry measuring cup and level off the excess. (Scooping directly from the bag compacts the flour, resulting in dry baked goods.)

Eggnog Cheesecake

Prep Time: 15 min.

Bake Time: 45 min. + chilling

Makes: 16 servings

1 c. graham cracker crumbs

2 T. sugar

3 T. butter, melted

Filling:

3 pkgs. (8 oz. each) cream cheese, softened

1 c. sugar

3 T. all-purpose flour

2 lg. eggs, room temp., lightly beaten

3/4 c. eggnog

1/2 tsp. rum extract

Dash ground nutmeg

Whipped cream and additional ground nutmeg, optional

Place a greased 9-in. springform pan on a double thickness of heavy-duty foil (about 18 in. square). Securely wrap foil around pan.

In a small bowl, combine the cracker crumbs, sugar and butter. Press onto the bottom of pan. Place on a baking sheet. Bake at 325° for 10 minutes. Cool on a wire rack.

In a large bowl, beat the cream cheese, sugar and flour until smooth. Add eggs; beat on low speed just until combined. Gradually stir in the eggnog, extract and nutmeg. Pour filling over crust.

Place springform pan in a larger baking pan; add 1 in. of hot water to larger pan.

Bake at 325° until center is just set and top appears dull, 45-50 minutes. Remove springform pan from water bath. Cool on a wire rack for 10 minutes. Loosen sides from pan with a knife; cool 1 hour longer. Refrigerate overnight, covering when completely cooled. If desired, top with whipped cream, then sprinkle with nutmeg.

Quote of the Week:

“Thank goodness for the first snow, it was a reminder--no matter how old you became and how much you'd seen, things could still be new if you were willing to believe they still mattered.”

~ Candace Bushnell