

Cooking Corner: Good party nibbles come in small packages

by Kathryn Rem

Some people think the star of a New Year's Eve party is the countdown to midnight. But more intriguing than the three ... two ... one ... are the fancy hors d'oeuvres that grace the serving trays and buffet table.

A no-fail canape served at holiday get-togethers is skewered shrimp and jalapeno slices wrapped in bacon.

"It's kind of hot and spicy. When you dip it in the sauce, it has an interesting blend of flavors," said Glenda Dodson, of Virden, Ill. "It's a little time-consuming by the time you wrap each one, but it's well worth it."

For a cocktail party, figure on three dips or spreads and five one- or two-bite hors d'oeuvres. Include a few shrimp or chicken skewers or meatballs to fill people up, and make sure the table has a variety of colors and shapes. Nuts, olives and crudites round out the menu.

Don't be embarrassed to buy some party trays and ready-made food items. It helps if a few of the made-from-scratch appetizers can be prepared a day or two in advance.

Here are some recipes to usher in the new year.

ENDIVE WITH GORGONZOLA AND WALNUTS

1/2 pound gorgonzola or blue cheese

1/2 pound cream cheese

1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce

64 walnut pieces

7 or 8 endives

Paprika (optional)

Yields about 64 hor d'oeuvres.

In food processor or blender, combine gorgonzola, cream cheese and Worcestershire sauce, and process until smooth. (May be prepared up to 2 days ahead of time.) Separate endive leaves; wash and dry them.

On each endive leaf, pipe or spoon about 1/2 tablespoon of cheese mixture. Place 1 walnut piece on top. Sprinkle with paprika for color, if desired.

Nutritional analysis per hor d'oeuvre: 50 calories, 2 g protein, 3 g carbohydrate, 4 g fat, 5 mg cholesterol, 2 g fiber, 75 mg sodium.

SMOKED SALMON CANAPES

Softened unsalted butter

8 slices European-style pumpernickel bread

1/2 pound smoked salmon, sliced very thin

1 tablespoon lemon juice

Capers, for garnish

Shreds of lemon zest, for garnish

Yields 20 large or 36 small canapes.

Spread butter on bread. Cut out shapes with cookie cutters or biscuit cutters. Use cutters to cut out identical shapes from salmon slices.

Place salmon over bread bases to fit exactly. Sprinkle with a few drops of lemon juice, and garnish with several capers and a few shreds of lemon zest.

Variation: Instead of garnishing with capers and lemon, fill pastry bag fitted with small round tip with creme fraiche, and pipe designs on the canapes. Garnish with a pretty chervil leaf or fennel leaves.

Nutritional analysis per small canape: 25 calories, 1 g protein, 3 g carbohydrate, 1 g fat, 5 mg cholesterol, 0 g fiber, 40 mg sodium.

- "The Art of the Cocktail Party" by Leslie Brenner (Plume, \$13.95).

BACON-WRAPPED SHRIMP

24 medium-size shrimp (about 1 pound), shelled and deveined

1/3 cup prepared balsamic vinaigrette

24 wooden toothpicks

12 slices bacon

24 pickled jalapeno slices

Yields 2 dozen appetizers.

Place shrimp and balsamic dressing into large, reusable plastic bag; refrigerate 15 to 30 minutes.

Soak toothpicks in water while shrimp is marinating.

Microwave bacon for 1 minute on high. Cut slices in 1/2 crosswise so there are 24 pieces; let cool.

Heat broiler. Coat large broiler pan with nonstick cooking spray.

Remove shrimp from marinade; reserve marinade. Put 1 piece of bacon on work surface. Place a shrimp at one end, tuck a jalapeno slice into curl of shrimp. Roll bacon up tightly around shrimp and jalapeno slice and

secure with toothpick. Repeat using all shrimp, bacon and jalapeno slices.

Place shrimp rolls on broiling rack and brush with reserved marinade. Broil 3 minutes, turn, broil on other side 3 minutes. Serve with dipping sauce (recipe follows).

DIPPING SAUCE

1/2 cup mayonnaise

1 tablespoon chili sauce

1 tablespoon sweet pickle relish

1 tablespoon sweet red pepper

Yields 24 appetizer servings.

In small mixing bowl, stir together mayonnaise, chili sauce, pickle relish, red pepper and 1 tablespoon water. Cover sauce and refrigerate until ready to use.

Nutritional analysis per serving: 100 calories, 3 g protein, 1 g carbohydrate, 10 g fat, 20 mg cholesterol, 0 g fiber, 190 mg sodium.

- Glenda Dodson, Virden, Ill.

MUSHROOMS STUFFED WITH SERRANO HAM

20 button or cremini mushrooms

5 or 6 thin slices serrano ham or prosciutto

4 tablespoons olive oil (divided use)

2 tablespoons minced shallots

1/4 cup fresh bread crumbs

3 tablespoons minced fresh parsley

2 tablespoons capers, minced

1/4 cup grated parmesan cheese

Yields 8 to 10 servings.

Preheat oven to 375 F. Remove stems from mushrooms. Mince stems and set aside with whole caps.

Mince 5 slices ham. Cut remaining slice into thin strips for garnish, if desired.

Heat 2 tablespoons olive oil in skillet over medium-high heat. Add shallots and saute until soft, about 1 minute. Add mushroom stems and saute 1 to 2 minutes, then add minced ham, bread crumbs, parsley and capers.

Put mushroom caps in bowl and toss with 1 tablespoon olive oil. Fill each cap with crumb filling and place in baking dish just large enough to hold them. Top with cheese and drizzle with remaining 1 tablespoon olive oil. Bake in oven until mushrooms are tender and cheese is melted, about 15 minutes. Serve warm, garnished with ham strips, if using.

Nutritional analysis per serving: 110 calories, 5 g protein, 4 g carbohydrate, 8 g fat, 10 mg cholesterol, 0 g

fiber, 350 mg sodium.

- "Williams-Sonoma Starters" by Danny Goldman, Georgeanne Brennan and Chuck Williams (Free Press, \$19.95).

CAJUN-SPICED NUTS

2 tablespoons bacon grease or canola oil

2 teaspoons fresh garlic, finely chopped

1 1/2 cups dry roasted, unsalted peanuts

1 cup pecan halves

1 cup walnut pieces

1 cup whole, unsalted cashews

1 cup whole, unsalted almonds

1 tablespoon Creole seasoning

2 teaspoons salt

1 tablespoon sugar

2 teaspoons black pepper, freshly ground

Yields 5 1/2 cups.

Preheat oven to 175 F.

In small saute pan, melt bacon grease over low heat. Add garlic and cook for 3 to 4 minutes. Do not brown garlic. Place all nuts in large mixing bowl. Drizzle bacon grease and garlic mixture over nuts and toss well to coat evenly.

In small batches, sprinkle seasonings and sugar over nuts, tossing nuts to distribute seasonings evenly. Pour

nuts out onto large baking sheet and place in oven. Cook for 45 minutes, stirring every 10 minutes.

Remove nuts from oven and allow to cool completely. Store in airtight container before serving. Spiced nuts will hold for 4 to 5 days.

Nutritional analysis per 1/4-cup serving: 210 calories, 6 g protein, 6 g carbohydrate, 20 g fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 2 g fiber, 210 mg sodium.

- "Deep South Parties: How to Survive the Southern Cocktail Hour Without a Box of French Onion Soup Mix, a Block of Processed Cheese, or a Cocktail Weenie" by Robert St. John (Hyperion, \$19.95).

RARE ROAST BEEF WITH HORSERADISH CREAM

12 baguette slices

Olive oil, for brushing

1/4 cup sour cream

2 teaspoons horseradish cream

Watercress sprigs

8 ounces rare roast beef, finely sliced

Yields 6 to 12 servings.

Brush bread with a little oil and toast in oven until golden and crisp on both sides.

In small bowl, mix together sour cream and horseradish cream.

To serve, place sprigs of watercress, a slice of beef and a dollop of sour cream mixture on toasted bread slices.

Nutritional analysis per serving: 210 calories, 12 g protein, 22 g carbohydrate, 8 g fat, 30 mg cholesterol, 1 g fiber, 270 mg sodium.

- "Instant Entertaining," by Donna Hay (Ecco, \$34.95).

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