

Cooking Corner: Get Easter rolling with ham balls

by Saimi Rote Bergmann

If ham is a must-have dish for your Easter brunch, but you are weary of the same old spiral cut, consider the homey ham ball.

Judy Goodpasture of Lake Township, Ohio, makes tender meatballs from ground ham and pork and serves them in a rich brown-sugar sauce.

PRETTY IN PINK - Judy Goodpasture's grandchildren cheer when she bakes mini loaves of strawberry bread. CNS Photo by Stan Myers. SWEET AND SALTY - Judy Goodpasture of Lake Township, Ohio, serves ham balls for Easter instead of baked ham. CNS Photo by Stan Myers. "They are my favorite alternative to baking a ham for dinner," she said. Her secret ingredient is Frosted Mini Wheats.

"I like (the ham balls) a little sweeter," she said. "The original recipe called for Shredded Wheat, but one year, I didn't have any, but I had the Frosted Mini Wheats. Then boy, I really liked them that way, and never made them the other way since."

More traditional fillers include crushed crackers, bread crumbs, oatmeal or cornflakes.

Ground ham can also be made into loaves, either formed on a baking sheet or packed in a loaf pan. If your grocery store doesn't carry ground ham, check with the butcher. Goodpasture gets hers ground to order. Some butcher shops have it ground and ready for sale.

A basic recipe starts with ground ham, cracker crumbs or bread crumbs, milk and eggs. From there, personal preference dictates whether to add chopped onion, chopped green pepper, pineapple, mustard, cloves or other seasonings. Some cooks substitute ground pork or turkey for part of the ham to cut the saltiness.

A variety of glazes, often fruity or mustard-based, can be brushed on or poured over the loaves or ham balls. One simple glaze is made from orange marmalade, spiced with ground mustard, vinegar, cinnamon and cloves. Another recipe calls for crushed pineapple to be mixed with mustard and brown sugar then spread on top of the loaf.

If you decide not to make a sauce, you can decorate the top of your ham loaf with alternating slices of tomato and hard-boiled egg, or alternating slices of sliced egg and fresh spinach leaves.

Both ham balls and ham loaf are perfect for a buffet because they are delicious hot, warm or at room temperature.

Another dish that always appears on Judy Goodpasture's Easter buffet is strawberry bread.

"The ham balls and the strawberry bread go together so well," she said. "We also have a sausage-and-egg casserole with it. The nice thing is the strawberry bread and the casserole can be done the night before."

The moist bread is a bright pink from the added strawberry gelatin and crushed strawberries.

"I buy the fresh strawberries when they are on sale, clean them, run them through the food processor and freeze them," she said. "Then I'm ready to make (strawberry bread) at any time."

JUDY'S HAM BALLS

1 pound ground pork

1 pound ground ham

2 eggs

3/4 cup milk

2/3 cup frosted shredded wheat cereal, crushed

Sauce:

1 1/2 cups packed brown sugar

2/3 cup water

1/3 cup vinegar

3/4 teaspoon ground mustard

Yields about 18 ham balls.

In bowl, combine pork, ham, eggs, milk, and cereal. Mix well with hands. Shape into 1- to 2-inch balls; place in greased 13x9 baking dish.

In saucepan over medium heat, combine sugar, water, vinegar and mustard and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer uncovered for 5 minutes. Pour sauce evenly over ham balls. Bake at 350 F for 1 hour or until browned.

- Judy Goodpasture, Lake Township, Ohio.

EASTER STRAWBERRY BREAD

3 cups flour

2 cups sugar

1 teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon salt

1 1/2 teaspoons cinnamon

1 (3-ounce) package strawberry Jell-O

4 eggs, beaten

1 cup vegetable oil

2 cups mashed strawberries

Yields 2 loaves.

Preheat oven to 350 F. In large bowl, stir all dry ingredients together. Make a well in dry ingredients; add eggs, oil and strawberries and mix together.

Divide batter evenly into 2 (9x5-inch) loaf pans. Bake for 1 hour.

Note: You can cut the recipe in 1/2 and bake it in 4 mini loaf pans for 35 minutes.

- Judy Goodpasture, Lake Township, Ohio.

BASIC HAM LOAF

2 pounds ground ham

3/4 cup crushed crackers or dry bread crumbs, or 1/2 cup quick oatmeal

1/2 to 3/4 cup milk

1 or 2 eggs

1 tablespoon mustard

Yields 1 loaf.

Beat eggs in large bowl. Stir in bread crumbs and milk. Mix in remaining ingredients. Form into loaf on baking sheet or pat into loaf pan. Bake at 350 F for 45 to 50 minutes.

Note: If desired, you can add any or all of the following: 1 clove garlic, minced or pressed; 1 small onion, chopped fine; or 1/2 green pepper, chopped fine.

Note: If you substitute ground pork or turkey for part of the ham, you should cook the ham loaf to an internal temperature of 160 degrees.

SQUARE HAM "LOAF" WITH MARMALADE SAUCE

2 eggs

2 cups milk

1 1/2 cups crushed herb-seasoned stuffing

1 medium onion, chopped

1/4 teaspoon salt

1 1/2 pounds ground pork

1 1/2 pounds cooked ham, ground

1 (12-ounce) jar orange marmalade

2 tablespoons cider vinegar

1 teaspoon ground mustard

1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1/8 teaspoon ground cloves

Yields 1 loaf.

In large bowl, combine eggs, milk and stuffing mix; let stand for 5 minutes. Add onion and salt. Crumble pork and ham over mixture and mix well. Pat into greased 9-inch square baking dish (pan will be full). Bake, uncovered, at 350 F for 30 minutes; drain. Bake 30 minutes longer; drain.

Combine marmalade, vinegar, mustard, cinnamon and cloves; spread over ham loaf. Bake 10 to 15 minutes or until meat thermometer inserted in loaf reads 160 F. Let stand for 5 to 10 minutes before cutting.

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