

Girlfriends in the KITCHEN

Issue #1

From the Kitchen of Marybeth Gregg

January 2005

I know you'll be very excited about this newsletter because it is packed with lots of ideas and tips to help you with everyday meals as well as with entertaining. In the new year, we all want to simplify our lives and be more organized. So I am giving you some of tips and recipes so that you can spend less time on the 'chores' and more time on having some fun with cooking. And also check out the special free bonus at the end of this newsletter. Best wishes to you and your family in this new year - may it be one of abundance, hope and peace.

Warmest Wishes

Marybeth Gregg

How can this newsletter help you? The New Year- time for simplifying and being organized- which also means less clutter when it comes to cooking. Here's some tips for you! With a little planning you can make the food shopping and preparation easier on yourself. Here's how:

Tip #1 - Get organized. Make lists and follow them. You can also use just a plain old paper list or get electronic. Anything will do. We just have too much to remember not to use an organizational tool. This is really useful in planning your meals and parties.

- I use the calendar feature on my Outlook program on email to help me remember what I have to do each day, no matter how little an errand or phone call it is. And when I do follow it, and check off what I needed to do, I feel such a sense of relief when I do this and you can, too, by just using your organizer.
- Write down your menu and ingredients you will need and decide on which stores do you need to go to and which items you need to buy in which stores.
- Write down your ingredients by store. I find this so time-saving, and it prevents backtracking for that one item you forgot to get.

Tip #2 - Simplify what you will be serving, whether it is for your own family meals or for your big party.

- Serve the best quality foods you can find.
- Buy the freshest ingredients available
- Cook whatever you can beforehand and freeze what is freezable
- If you are entertaining, take others up on their offer to bring something
- Use local, high-quality caterers or specialty stores to fill in the big items.

For example, I went to a wonderful holiday party a few weeks ago. The hostess had responded to guests who wanted to bring something with a sincere 'thank you' and made her suggestions on what to bring. A few of us brought appetizers and desserts, and she had the best specialty Italian gourmet store in the area make the most delectable chicken and pasta dishes. She made some wonderful appetizers herself, a great salad and since she is a gifted chocolatier in her spare time, treated us all her heavenly candies and perfect chocolate-dipped strawberries. So, although it was still a lot of work on her part, there were a number of things she didn't have to worry about. It was a perfect party filled with friends and delicious food, and she had time to mingle with the guests and enjoy her own party.

So, the moral of the story is -you don't have to do it all. Give yourself permission to get help.

Tip of the Month

For any dinner, add some Pizzazz to a simple idea!

Now that the holidays are over, we need some excitement during these drab winter days. Use interesting martini or other glass to showcase a dessert or even an appetizer. You can do a simple shrimp cocktail in a beautiful glass, or a sorbet, as shown here, to really enhance a basic food item.

A **colorful garnish**, such as fresh, mint, cilantro, a fresh orange slice, or even a flower adds the final touch to what might otherwise be a tasty, but plain, course. A garnish always makes the nice into the "wow."

Easy Recipes for Entertaining

Everyone wants easy recipes for these cold winter nights. Yes- this is pasta which need not be the 'forbidden fruit' - healthy eating is about balance in all of the food groups. If you serve a smaller sized portion, use whole wheat pasta or even cooked spaghetti squash, and have a great salad, this is really a wonderfully healthy and satisfying meal. Either you are having a small group of friends over or need a delicious and easy meal for your family. Here are two of my most mouth-watering and easy, **one dish meals and salads** for something really heart-warming and delicious. I've included **preparation tips** to make it even easier!

MB's Pasta Bolognese©

Serves 4-6 people.

Sauce:

½ cup sweet onion, chopped
½ cup carrot, chopped
½ cup celery, chopped
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 large can (2 lbs) chopped Italian tomatoes with their juice
2 tablespoons tomato paste
1 small can tomato sauce
2 oz. pancetta or prosciutto, chopped
4-5 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
¼ cup fresh chopped parsley
1 ½ lbs of chopped beef or chicken, or a mix of chopped beef and pork
½ cup dry white wine
1 can chicken broth
1 bay leaf
1 teaspoon oregano
Pinch of crushed red (hot) pepper flakes - optional
1/2 cup light cream
¼ cup grated fresh Parmesan cheese
Salt and fresh ground pepper to taste
1 lb. tagliatelle or thin spaghetti or whole wheat spaghetti

For Sauce:

Heat olive oil in heavy Dutch oven or heavy-bottomed pot and sauté onion, carrot, celery on medium heat until golden brown, about 3-4 minutes. Sauté Prosciutto for 2 minutes. Add garlic for 1 minute only to soften— do not brown it - and remove vegetables and prosciutto from pan. Add more olive oil and sauté meat until lightly cooked until all the pink is gone, but not brown. This will keep the meat at just the right consistency. Drain oil and return cooked vegetables to pot. Add wine and cook for 2-3 minutes, then add tomatoes, paste, sauce and broth and stir well. Add parsley, bay leaf, oregano, cheese, salt and pepper and red pepper flakes if using them. Cook, covered, on medium to medium low for 1 hour, stirring occasionally. Keep the sauce at a constant low boil. Just before serving, add cream and cook on low for another 3-4 minutes. Taste and adjust the seasonings. Cook pasta until al dente. Drain and add 1 cup sauce to a large serving bowl, add pasta and toss until pasta is all covered (add more sauce if

Do-Ahead Tips:

- This is one of those sauces that is so delicious right away and can improve even more when the flavors come together for a few days. Sauce can be made up to 2 days in advance - just don't add the cream until you are ready to serve it. Keep tightly covered and refrigerated.
- To serve, warm the sauce over medium heat until it comes to a low boil, making sure that you stir occasionally. When hot, add the cream and cook for another few minutes. Sauce can also be frozen

Preparation Tips:

- When browning vegetables, be sure to keep the heat on medium - you just want them to be a golden color. Save the garlic for last- this only takes a minute or else you will get a bitter taste if it is browned.

Use a mini-chopper which you can buy for under \$20.00. This is a great time saving helper that you can use to chop these vegetables in a minute!

needed.) Serve with remaining sauce and more grated cheese. Serve with a salad and fresh, crusty bread and a good wine. Nothing could be better in the winter!

Mixed Green Salad with Orange Vinaigrette©

Makes 4-6 servings.

6 cups loosely packed, torn, washed combination of romaine lettuce, micro greens or baby spinach
Kosher salt and fresh ground pepper, to taste
1/4 cup finely sliced red onion - optional
2 teaspoons coarsely chopped fresh basil
1/4 cup fennel, trimmed and sliced in matchsticks- optional
2 cups baby spinach, arugula, or mixed micro greens
1 can artichoke hearts, in water, drained and quartered
Fresh Parmesan shavings

Dressing:

1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
3 tablespoons balsamic vinegar or fig balsamic vinegar
4 tablespoons orange juice
1 tablespoon honey
Kosher salt and fresh ground pepper to taste

For Dressing: Whisk until thickened the oil, vinegar, orange juice, honey, salt and pepper together. Set aside. In a large bowl, add greens, onion, fennel, basil, artichoke hearts and dressing just before serving. Toss well. Add Parmesan shavings on top and serve.

Do-Ahead Tips:

- Dressing can be made up to 5 days in advance. Keep tightly covered and refrigerated. Whisk again before serving.
- Wash and dry greens - without the artichoke hearts or onions- up to a day in advance, making sure they are dry. Store in a plastic freezer bag with a paper towel to keep greens fresh.

Preparation Tips:

- I always love to mix different ingredients into my salads. The more the merrier. If you want to add orange sections- no seeds- or grape tomatoes or black olives, they would be great additions! BE creative with your salads and you can't go wrong.

Cookbook Recommendation

***CAFE PARADISO SEASONS*, by Denis Cotter.**

Hylas Publishing, Irvington, N.Y. 2004

While perusing cookbooks recently in the bookstore, I was intrigued by the description on the inside cover of this book and decided to keep reading. I was thrilled by the scrumptious and healthy recipes - just wait until you see the luscious food photography! It makes your mouth water just to look at this book! The recipes are arranged by the seasons, which I find very useful. This book was the winner of the Gourmand World Cookbook Awards for the Best Vegetarian Cookbook in the World in 2003.

This is an exquisite book- I could tell from the first pages on that it was a labor of love. Chef Cotter owns the Café Paradiso which is describes as an “unassuming little restaurant in the heart of Cork City in Ireland and has been called the “best vegetarian restaurant in Europe”....” and one of the best restaurants of any kind” by Frommer. I recently corresponded with Denis by email and I must say that he sent me one of the nicest notes in return. I was delighted to receive his kind reply.

So, Denis utilized the best fresh vegetables, cheeses and nuts, just to name a few ingredients, in such inventive ways that most of us would never even imagine. His gratin of roast pumpkin, leeks, corn and hazelnuts in a Gabriel cream cheese is heaven on earth! There are influences from the Far East, from the Mediterranean and from Middle Eastern cuisines. There is truly something for everyone’s palate.

Desserts know no limits – try the Chocolate pecan pie with whiskey ice cream and darling clementines. Denis recommends using “Irish whiskey” to poach the clementines since the “Irish whiskey is very smooth and clean.”

You can tell that he has spent many, many hours developing and testing these recipes so that the end results are masterful. And they are really worth for you to try something so extra-ordinary. He spells out each step for you – the instructions are very well written and easy to understand and make.

This book is also a great incentive for you to expand your culinary skills- without being difficult.

I have to say this is the best cookbook I have bought in a very long time and recommend that you buy it right away. You’ll be very pleased that you did.

NEED A SPECIAL GIFT IDEA??

GIFT CERTIFICATES ARE AVAILABLE FOR CUSTOMIZED COOKING LESSONS TO THRILL ANY COOK. MAKE GIFT SHOPPING EASY ON YOURSELF AND MAKE YOUR RECIPIENT DELIGHTED WITH THIS SPECIAL GIFT. CAN YOU BELIEVE IT BUT IT'S NOT TOO EARLY TO START THINKING ABOUT VALENTINE'S DAY.

?????What is Cook-with-Confidence???????

As seen in a recent New York Times "Dining In" section on trends, the latest in cooking classes is learning at home. I have been teaching these programs for over two years and my students love the convenience and programs which are like a class and party at the same time!

This is a cooking school that comes to you. Wouldn't you like to learn to cook interesting and delicious new foods that you can cook in advance? And learn great techniques and shortcuts to great meals? Private or group cooking lessons are offered in your home. Learn basic techniques to intermediate skills with ease and have fun at the same time! These are hands-on classes - you get to try out your new skills and will be amazed at how well you do in a short amount of time! You get to learn by doing - new cuisines, new methods, new tastes.

NEW PROGRAMS ARE AVAILABLE FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION, GROUP OR CLUBS! Aren't you always looking for a new and interesting speaker or activity for your meetings? Contact me for the latest program offerings. I provide great recipes and demonstrate new techniques and lots of delicious samples for your next meeting or event.

A SPECIAL BONUS FOR NEWSLETTER MEMBERS- FOR THE MONTH OF JANUARY, YOU CAN SEND AN EMAIL TO ME IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ON THESE RECIPES OR ANY OTHER COOKING QUESTION. I WILL RESPOND TO YOU PERSONALLY AND IT'S FREE.

Contact me at : marybeth.gregg@cook-with-confidence.com
CHECK OUT MY NEW WEBSITE FOR MORE RECIPES AND TIPS
Website- www.cook-with-confidence.com

Marybeth Gregg has been cooking, entertaining and giving cooking advice for almost 20 years. She is well-known for her wonderful cuisine and great parties. She started her successful cooking school two years ago. She has attended cooking schools in Chicago, Philadelphia and in the New York metropolitan area. She lives in central New Jersey and has been featured in the Asbury Park Press and the Coast Star newspapers and was one of only ten culinary experts to be invited to the Spring Lake Kitchen Tour this fall.

Marybeth is currently working on publishing a cookbook and a series of video tapes and dvd's of cooking lessons.