

Girlfriends in the **KITCHEN**



ISSUE # 4

From the Kitchen of Marybeth Gregg

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Spring is nature's way of saying 'Let's Party' - as told to me by a good friend a long time ago.

Happy Spring to everyone.

Everyday more and more fresh fruits and vegetables pop up at the grocery. Take advantage of all of the flavors, and colors that the new season is bringing in. Look below for an easy and delicious salad recipe for MIXED GREENS SALAD WITH APPLE-CHERRY BALSAMIC DRESSING AND BRIE that I developed, which has great colors and textures.

In this issue, I will talk about how you can make even the simplest of meals into something more special just by adding a few, simple garnishes or an extra touch to your table setting. As we look out our windows at all the new colors of spring, I thought that it would be great to also bring colors indoors to your food and table. I've included lots of tips that you can use to send a welcoming message to your guests, and family, too. Enjoy your cooking and, remember, you can always write to me with any food issues or inquiries. I am starting a new feature in this newsletter answering your questions, so write to me. I love to hear from you.

Marybeth Gregg

Tip # 1 - You know the saying "We eat with our eyes first." So, speaking of colors, this month's page is devoted to showing you how to use color and inexpensive garnishes and table setting to make even the simplest of meals, special for your guests and family, too. The message to your guest is that you took the extra few minutes to make them more welcome.

That Extra Touch- From Garnishes to Table Settings

I thought that you would enjoy some 'secrets' to creating beautiful and interesting tables and serving dishes. These ideas keep it simple for you - no need to get elaborate or spend a lot. Remember- simple is best.

Tip #2 GARNISHES

Garnish food at the last minute. It will look fresher than if you garnish a dish, then let it sit in the refrigerator several hours.

This is a partial list to get you started:

Fresh herbs such as bunches of chives, rosemary, thyme, oregano, sage or variegated sage, curly mint or pineapple mint- I like to tie these with a matching fabric ribbon or scallions.

The top greens of leeks, chives tied in bundles or scallion greens, Caper berries, capers, thinly sliced gherkins or cornichons, thin asparagus.

Bright red radishes, or look for the long French radishes; whole or halved cherry tomatoes.

Halves of lemons, limes or oranges, sliced on the bottom so they will stay flat; insert a piece of fresh rosemary into the citrus half, or fan citrus slices with a cherry tomato in the center for color contrast, mini-pineapples or pineapple tops.

Bunches of grapes and ivy.

Whole strawberries or raspberries scattered around the dish with a shake of confectioners sugar. Cranberries or mango slices in season.

And finally, greens such as collard, curly endive, Belgian endive, collard greens and banana leaves.

As you can tell this list can be endless so **go get creative.**

Tip #3 : THEME.

Start with a theme - choose something of interest to you, match it to a holiday or season, such as A Southern Spring , Texas BBQ, New England Clam Bake, a Seashore Summer - you get the idea. This theme will get you started on how you use the rest of these tips.

Tip #4 : Color

This is what the eye sees first. Use color to add interest to your tables. Colors such as red, silver and gold create a rich effect, while contrasts like chartreuse with hot pink or turquoise are very eye-catching.

Tip #5 Details

What you add to the table makes all the difference. Sprinkling confetti or flowers, small cactus plants, clusters of grapes and candles, and draping ribbons are all so simple and eye-catching.

Tip #6 Candles

Add a bowl of floating candles or placing votive lights around will provide atmosphere as well as gentle illumination.

Tip #7 Height

Bring your tables to life by transforming them from a flat surface. Use interesting containers. Add height by using tall vases or candles. You can also use shoe boxes or bricks of different sizes draped with fabric or cloth napkins. Be sure the candles or vases are anchored securely.

Remember - the more interesting the display is that you create, the more welcome your guests will feel.

Make it Easy on Yourself

As the days get longer and the weather gets warmer, be sure to start thinking about outdoor grilling. For some reason, it always seems less of a 'chore' to make an interesting salad and grill some meat or fish and you have your meal.

Try some great new vinegars on your salad to give it a different twist. I love the Cherry or Fig Balsamic vinegars that you can buy at Williams Sonoma. They both have a just hint of sweetness for a change. Both are also good in a marinade for fish or meat. Just this one change will get you out of the rut of serving the same old thing.

ANNOUNCING THE WINNER OF THE RECIPE CONTEST . . .

Thanks to all of you who submitted stories and recipes last month:

As I promised, she is- Elizabeth DiPaolo of Rumson New Jersey. Thank you, Elizabeth. This is her husband's recipe for a delicious Linguini in Clam Sauce

The DiPaolo's Easy Linguini with Clam Sauce

Makes 6-8 servings

Linguine with Clam Sauce:

- 1 1/2 boxes linguine cooked according to package directions
- 1 can petit diced tomatoes with the juice
- 1 package of fresh white button mushrooms thinly sliced
- 4 shallots thinly sliced
- 1/8 cup of extra virgin olive oil, more if necessary
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley
- 1/4 cup of dry white wine
- 4T of fresh lemon juice
- Salt and pepper to taste.
- 2 cans of whole baby clams with the juice
- 1/2 cup of clam juice

In a large frying pan heat the oil and add the shallots. Cook until softened and then add the mushrooms and cook until soft about 5 minutes. Add the tomatoes with the juice, lemon juice, clam juice and white wine and bring to a simmer until the sauce is slightly reduced (about 5-8 minutes. Add the clams and the parsley and season with salt and pepper. I like this very lemony and might try adding some lemon zest as well. Toss with the linguine and serve immediately on a large shallow platter. We also add hot red pepper flakes.

This is easy and delicious. You could also use whole wheat pasta for those who are watching their white starches, but I love it with regular linguini. As long as we eat anything in moderation, I think we should use all of the food groups.

Bonus Recipe and Cooking Tips Included

So this is that great salad recipe I told you about. Garnish with lemon zest or fresh chopped parsley for color.

MIXED GREENS SALAD WITH APPLE-CHERRY BALSAMIC DRESSING AND BRIE

Makes 4 - 6 servings

1 1/4 cups dried cherries
1/2 cup tawny Port
4 ounces Prosciutto di Parma or bacon, chopped - optional
1 tablespoon shallots, minced
1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil
1/4 cup cherry balsamic wine vinegar, or other good quality balsamic
2 teaspoons sugar
5- 6 -ounces of ripe Brie, Saga Blue, goat cheese, or other semi soft cheese, cut into 1/2-inch-thick slices
about 8 oz. mixed salad greens such as mesclun salad
1/2 thinly sliced-Granny Smith Apple, skin on
1/2 cup walnuts, toasted

Combine cherries and Port in heavy small saucepan. Bring to simmer over medium heat. Remove from heat; let stand until cherries swell, about 5 minutes. If using, sauté Prosciutto in heavy medium to large skillet over medium-low heat until crisp, about 8 minutes. Add shallots; cook 2 minutes. Be careful not to burn the shallots. Add oil, then vinegar and sugar; stir until sugar dissolves. Stir in cherry mixture. Season with salt and pepper. (Dressing can be made 2 hours ahead. Set aside in skillet at room temperature.)

Meanwhile, combine salad greens, apples and nuts in bowl. Whisk dressing and pour over salad; toss to blend. Top with cheese and serve. Serve with a garnish of fresh parsley or fresh lemon zest and enjoy the compliments.

Do-Ahead Tips:

Vinaigrette can be made up to a day hours in advance. Refrigerate and bring to room temperature before serving.

Sauté Prosciutto, and toast nuts the day before so all you have to do is slice the apple, toss the greens and put on the dressing just before serving.

Have fun cooking and enjoy the season's best.

Marybeth Gregg

?????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 while learning. These are hands-on classes - you get to try out your new skills and will be delighted at how well you do in a short amount of time. You get to learn by doing - new cuisines, new methods, new tastes.

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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.

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