

Girlfriends in the **KITCHEN**



ISSUE # 9

From the Kitchen of Marybeth Gregg November 2005

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"Time To Be Grateful"

I have been thinking a lot about being grateful, lately. And not just because of the season, but for the many little things in my life. I think it is because we have seen so many images of people who have lost everything in the floods and hurricanes this year that it has made me slow down and think about all of the goodness in my life. From my family and great friends, to biting into a fresh, crisp apple, I am trying to focus on the abundance that is around us in this season. So this is a great time to enjoy not just those apples and pomegranates (short season so try them now – great in salads) and other gifts from the earth, but also to treasure the things great and small, in our lives.

Speaking of gifts from the earth, the guest contributor this month is a wine expert who has written a great article on sparkling wines which I know you will find informative and helpful.

*Recipes this month are ones you will use over and over again. These were developed for a class I did for the Rumson Newcomers Club of New Jersey. These are great side dishes for Thanksgiving which are delicious and, most importantly, **can be made ahead**. We all need to have some time-savers so that we, too, can enjoy the day.*

So remember to make it easy on yourself as Thanksgiving approaches, get others involved, take them up on offers of help, use some short cuts and take a deep breath when you are feeling overwhelmed.

Marybeth Gregg

Thanksgiving Table Decorations

Besides the tips from last month's issue, you can use fresh cranberries for a beautiful addition to your table. Use a serving platter or decorative plate and place a large, pillar candle in the center. Spread cranberries around the base of the candle. Or fill a vase with cranberries and place a candle in the center, being careful not to let the berries catch fire. You can float the cranberries also, in a glass container with white mums, stems cut off.

Make an arrangement with gourds, pumpkins, apples, sticks, branches, fall leaves, and pine cones. Have the kids gather these and put something together if you are having a less formal meal- it's great to get them involved and create something for the family. These are easy and colorful ways to spark up your table. Remember- keep it simple and get others involved.

GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

"Wine Talk", PRESENTED BY JOE EGAN JR.

Joe is a wine expert, and owns EGAN'S SPRING LAKE LIQUORS. If you live in the area, you know how helpful Joe is at suggesting wines to go with every occasion. He thought that you will enjoy this article on sparkling wines, with the holidays fast approaching. (Not that we should need any excuse to enjoy a great sparkling wine.)

Joe writes, " When reaching for the bubbly, you should realize that not all sparkling wine is Champagne. The term applies only to wine produced in the 85,000 acre Champagne district of northern France, a region less than 100 miles from Paris. It is made by a process called "methode Champenois," which involves a slow second fermentation. In the bottle that produces fine bubbles.

"Vintners elsewhere in France and other countries employ this method of second fermentation but all defer to France by keeping the work "Champagne" off their labels. German bubbles are know as "skets." Spanish sparklers go by the name "cavas." And Italian sparkling wines are called "spumantes." There is but one "Champagne." "Sparkling wines and champagnes are great for about just about any occasion."

Thank you, Joe, for sharing this great information about sparkling wines. There are many types of sparkling wines in all price ranges from all over the world, from the light to the sweet. You can visit with Joe if you do live in the Spring Lake, NJ, area (he is a t 516 warren Ave., 732 449-7090), or with your local wine store for recommendations.

Champagne and Food

So all of this talk about sparkling wines, of course, makes me think about food, and what is best to eat with these wines.

Matching any food and wine is a totally individual choice. Everyone has a totally different sense of taste and preference so you need to decide for yourself what you like best. Don't be tied down by what anyone else says should work. But read through these thoughts - they are only guidelines!! Get recommendations – test things out and eat and drink what you enjoy.

Typically, you want to start with delicate tastes and work towards heavier tastes. For this reason, Champagne tends to go very well with appetizers or a light first course. It also goes well with sushi and very light meals, and of course as an after-dinner or dessert celebration.

Appetizers – the trick is to keep it light and not overpower the wine.

Cheeses

A classic combination is Champagne and cheese. You don't normally want to eat a whole, heavy meal with Champagne - you want to savor the fine wine and enjoy its texture and flavor. Cheese such as a brie which goes wonderfully with a gentle Champagne, something light and fruity, or chevré, which can be paired with the stronger Champagnes that have a bit of kick to them, complement the flavor.

Stuffed Mushrooms

Mushrooms and Champagne are a great pairing, so any sort of appetizer you can create using mushrooms will go quite nicely.

Sushi, Oysters, Shellfish

All of these go perfectly with sparkling wines. (Save the heavy cocktail sauce- the horseradish can kill the flavor of the wine.)

Desserts

Strawberries, raspberries, anything with fruit. Chocolate is really fine. Again, see your wine merchant for the best pairings.

My Favorite Champagne Cocktail

Although some people hate to dilute anything in Champagne, I always enjoy a very old fashioned drink that is very simple to make.

The recipe:

Place the sugar cube in the bottom of a champagne flute. Soak sugar cube with Angostura bitters. Fill with champagne. Garnish with a lemon twist.

So for a treat, add a bottle or two of sparkling wine with your Thanksgiving meal – either with appetizers or to cleanse the palate after that heavy meal. Enjoy.

November Holidays

Besides Thanksgiving on the 24 th, please be sure to remember Veterans Day on November 11 th.

Bake some cookies for a retired veteran you may know in the neighborhood, just to say that they are not forgotten. And there are some wonderful organizations where you can 'adopt' a soldier. For example, www.soldiersangels.org is a truly worthwhile organization. This would also be a great way to spend time with the family.

November Recipes:

Here are two of the best recipes you can make ahead for Thanksgiving. If you are not a mushroom fan, you can eliminate the mushrooms from this dish and substitute other fillings, or just make the mashed potatoes ahead of time. They are really delicious, and no more whipping up the potatoes at the last minute when all you want to do is sit down and eat.

MASHED POTATO CASSEROLE WITH FRESH MUSHROOMS

Makes 9 –10 servings

*Mushroom Mix

6 ounces of white button mushrooms, sliced
6 ounces of cremini or baby Bella mushrooms, sliced
3 – 4 tablespoons of butter
1/2 cup finely chopped sweet onions
1/4 cup finely chopped shallots
1/2 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme
1/4 teaspoon salt
Freshly ground black pepper
1/2 cup milk + a little more if needed
1 tablespoon all-purpose flour

*Mushroom Preparation

Melt 2 tablespoons butter in large sauté pan, and cook onion and shallot over medium heat for 3-4 minutes, until lightly golden (stir often). Add 2 more

tablespoons butter, then the mushrooms, thyme, salt and pepper, and garlic, and cook about 5 minutes on medium high heat until water from the mushrooms has evaporated, stirring often. Combine ½ cup milk and flour a small bowl and mix into a paste. Add this to the mushrooms and bring to a boil. Cook one minute until thick, and keep stirring! Add more milk if too thick. Remove from heat.

Potatoes

3 1/2 pounds of peeled and cubed Yukon gold or Idaho potatoes
1/2 cup milk plus ¼ cup if needed
3 -4 tablespoons butter
1 teaspoon salt
Fresh ground pepper
1 large egg, lightly beaten
Chopped fresh parsley - optional

Potato Preparation

Place potatoes in medium saucepan, in cold salted water to cover. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer about 12 - 15 minutes until tender but not mushy. Drain and place back on very low burner to dry out potatoes. Microwave butter and ½ cup milk for about 1 minute until butter melts (be sure to cover this so it doesn't boil over), Remove, cool for a few minutes, and then add egg gradually to this mix so it doesn't scramble. Add all to potatoes with salt and pepper. Add remaining milk if too dry. Mash with a potato masher or food mill.

Spread half of potato mix on a buttered, 2 quart casserole. Top with mushroom mixture, and spread remaining potatoes on top. Cover with plastic wrap or wax paper, and vent a corner. Microwave on high for about 8 minutes until thoroughly heated.

Do Ahead Tips. Assemble and chill the dish up to one day in advance. Cover and refrigerate. Microwave, covered with wax paper, on high for about 8 - 10 minutes Times will vary with your microwave, be careful not to over cook.

*Also – experiment – if you are not a mushroom fan, use caramelized onions in a layer, or sautéed leeks, onions and carrots. You can use a mild shredded cheese, if desired.

FRESH GREEN BEANS WITH MUSTARD-SHALLOT DRESSING

Makes 4-6 servings.

1 pound fresh green beans, trimmed
Fresh basil, to taste
Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

Dressing:

4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
1 teaspoon white wine vinegar
2 teaspoons whole grain Dijon mustard
1 shallot, minced

Emulsify (whisk until thickened) dressing ingredients together until thick and thoroughly mixed.

Cook beans uncovered until tender, about 5-8 minutes. Do not overcook. Drain and refresh under cold running water to keep green color. Pour dressing over green beans and season with salt and pepper and fresh basil if desired. Serve hot or at room temperature.

Preparation Tips

When buying beans, look for those that are smooth and unblemished. If they are speckled with brown and wrinkled, they are old and tough. Do not cover green beans while cooking- they will give up their fresh green color.

Do-Ahead Tips Dressing can be made up to two days in advance. Cover and refrigerate. Bring to room temperature and whisk again before serving.

Festive Cranberry-Raspberry Mold

Go to the Web site (www.girlfriendsinthekitchen.com) for this delicious cranberry side dish, and more. It sure beats that jelled stuff, and is full of fresh fruit. Can be made up to two days in advance- more time for you to enjoy the day. I have made this recipe for over 20 years and everyone loves it so much.

ASK THE COOK!

This question was emailed to me and I thought that you would find it interesting, especially as Turkey Day approaches. . .

LJ writes: “Could you tell me how to make a smooth gravy for my turkey? Also, I sometimes over-salt it because it tastes flat. How can this be fixed?”

MBG: “ I like to use cornstarch in stead of flour. Be sure to add cold water so it will melt into the water. You can also strain it in a sieve before pouring it into the gravy boat. There are a thousand recipes for turkey gravy on Google, so just choose one that looks easy to you.

“If it is overly salted, you can correct it by adding some sliced potatoes and cooking them until they are translucent. Remove them carefully before serving- they will absorb the salt. To compensate for a flat-tasting gravy, do two things. Make sure that you scrape and use up all of the brown bits on the bottom of the pan. This is where the flavor is.

“And keep a can or two of good-quality chicken broth on hand to add flavor, if needed. I like Swanson , and it comes in a convenient box. Hope this helps, and there always is that Turkey Hotline”

Be sure to keep sending your cooking questions — I do love to hear from you all.

ANNOUNCING: “GIRLFRIENDS IN THE KITCHEN”

New Logo and Website in Process

If you've been on my website lately, you will see a new name www.girlfriendsinthekitchen.com. I have decided to focus more on women- not to exclude the men. It's just that almost all of the feedback and interest has been from women so that's what I am responding to. (In addition, I still have the Confident Cook Cooking School of New Jersey for everyone.)

I have been blessed to have met a wonderful graphic artist and designer, Leeza Hernandez-Stelzer, who has produced the most beautiful logo for me which you can see here. She really understood my vision and came up with this design –

Leeza explains - “The seeds in the apple represent friendships and the idea of growth together, apples seeds lead to trees, growth, solid friendships, etc. Bringing in the knife/fork element and a tablecloth to represent a gathering.” Pretty cool stuff- I am very excited about this change and this design. (If you have any graphic design needs, I would recommend Leeza very highly www.conkertree.com)

I'll be able to offer some real products to you in a short while – neat aprons, utensils, etc. They will be useful and stylish and I know you will really enjoy them.

So that is why I have decided to change the name of the Cook Book – it will be **“GIRLFRIENDS IN THE KITCHEN”**

Designed to be fun and filled with memories – a series of recipes and stories of women who will share their memories of cooking with their mothers, grandmothers, aunts, cousins, daughters and girlfriends I have used a lot of the recipes that I intended for my original idea, with lots of extras focusing on us girls and their stories. I'd still love to have some more stories from you – happy, funny, memorable, and a recipe if you would like, for inclusion into this book.)

If you are interested, please send an email to me at marybeth.gregg@verizon.net, or go to www.cookwithjoy.com and I will give you all of the details.

I am so excited and I hope you will be a part of this, too.

UPCOMING NEWS

Lots of great Food, Table and Decorating ideas for the big holidays in December.

Another new guest contributor whose information I know you will love. More information on wine, too.

Food for Thought

America's Second Harvest Network is responding to Hurricane Relief disaster and to others in need of basic food. Please visit their Web site: www.secondharvest.com.

I hope you enjoy this issue. I continue to get emails telling how much people look forward to my newsletter – thank you. It makes me feel really good to hear from you. If there is anything of particular interest that you would like me to include, be sure to let me know. You can reach me at: marybeth.gregg@verizon.net .

Enjoy the best of the season!

?????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.

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.

GO TO MY 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.

Visit my [Cook With Confidence Web Site](#)

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