

# Girlfriends in the KITCHEN



ISSUE # 8

From the Kitchen of Marybeth Gregg

October 2005

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## "Autumn Reflections"

The calendar says it's October, but it's is still warm , which is really confusing because not only has the Halloween 'stuff' been in the stores, but the Christmas decorations are being displayed already. My confusion also extends to cooking - I am ready for those hearty one-pot dinners, and the oven being on but my geraniums and dahlias are in full bloom. No matter - I have been busy with lots of new recipes and cooking programs and moving on to the wonderful vegetables and fruits of the fall. I have developed a smooth and totally comforting soup - Butternut Squash and Apple Soup- which you can find below.

*Autumn does seem to be a time of reflection – of warm summer days past, and somewhat nostalgic feelings as the wind starts to blow and the leaves start to fall. So I try to look ahead and not back, and think about all that is bountiful this season.*

*So when you think of fall foods, what comes to mind? Apples, pumpkins, and grapes, of course. Think of using these fruits not just in desserts, but as part of salads, and main courses also. I offer two great recipes below that bring out the best of this seasons harvest.*



*Let yourself enjoy this season- after raking the leaves, jump in the piles like you did when you were little! Look up at the trees instead of down at the pavement. Discover an autumn sunset- these small delights give us great joy if we allow it.*

*Marybeth Gregg*

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## APPLES AND PUMPKINS AND GOURDS, OH MY

There are so many great-looking gourds and pumpkins and no two are alike. Grab handfuls of them and toss them into a basket and fill with silk leaves. It makes a beautiful centerpiece that will last through the season.

If you are having a party, get some lovely red apples - making sure that they sit flat on the table. Scoop out a small hole on top and fit one of those small votive lights in it. They look and smell wonderful on your autumn table. You can do the same with mini-pumpkins, or mix the two. Use 6 or more of these and your dinner will be beautiful! Or take a footed cake plate and scatter the mini-pumpkins on top of it with a few candles intermingled on the plate. The cake plate stands at a nice height so that the centerpiece is not too high or tall for good conversation over the table.

Take a handful of those small bunches of wheat, tie them with a ribbon in an autumn color and place the bundle in a small crystal glass or other short container. You can even put one of these at each place setting, or place the bundle on each napkin.

## OCTOBER IS BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

October is a very special month – there are very few of us who have not been touched in some way by this disease. These are two of my favorite organizations devoted to this cause.

[www.komen.org](http://www.komen.org) For more than 20 years, the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation has been a global leader in the fight against breast cancer through its support of innovative research and community-based outreach programs.

[www.thebreastcancersite.com](http://www.thebreastcancersite.com) Founded to help offer f-r-e-e mammograms to underprivileged women nationwide. With a simple, daily "click" visitors help provide mammograms to those in need.

*Please take time this month to learn more and to be sure that you are up to date with your annual mammogram. It only takes a few minutes to make that call for your appointment, so please do it now.*

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## October Recipes:

Last month I did promise you one-pot meals but to tell you the truth, I am making lots of soups instead, paired with salads. I just haven't gotten into the more stew-like meals but you will see them in a future issue. In the meantime, I know you will enjoy these two recipes.

A **hearty salad** is wonderfully delicious in the fall. This is one of my favorites- I've added capers and lemon zest to this classic dish. Serve with a good soup and a light red wine, and you have a quick, easy and satisfying dinner. Whenever I make this, everyone wants more.

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### TUSCAN BREAD SALAD

3/4 cup extra virgin olive oil  
1/3 cup good quality balsamic vinegar  
2 shallots, minced  
1 garlic clove, minced  
Zest and Juice of 1 lemon  
3 tablespoons fresh minced Italian parsley, oregano, or basil or a combination  
Kosher salt  
Lots of freshly-ground black pepper  
3- 4 cups day-old Italian bread, cut into 1-inch cubes  
6 ounces fresh mozzarella, cut into small cubes  
4 cups grape tomatoes, halved (or use regular tomatoes, diced)  
2 tablespoons of small capers, drained  
1/2 cup black oil-cured olives, pitted and sliced  
1/2 cup fresh basil – shredded into large pieces

1. Place vinegar, shallots, and garlic in a medium bowl. Stir in olive oil, zest, lemon juice, and herbs.  
Taste and season with salt and pepper.

2. In a large bowl, toss together the bread and mozzarella. Pour two-thirds of the dressing over, and toss again. Add the tomatoes, olives, basil, and remaining dressing, and toss thoroughly. Taste, adjust seasoning, and serve immediately

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### BUTTERNUT SQUASH SOUP WITH A TOUCH OF APPLES

**This soup** is so deliciously smooth and satisfying. The squash and the cider make an incredible flavor. Can be made ahead several days in advance, and it also improves over night as the flavors blend together.

2 tablespoons unsalted butter  
1 cup Vidalia or other sweet onion, chopped (1 medium)  
1 large butternut squash  
1- 2 sweet apples, such as McIntosh  
1 teaspoons kosher salt

Freshly round black pepper  
2 cans good quality chicken broth  
1-2 cups water, optional if needed  
1/2 cup fresh apple cider  
1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves

#### Garnish

1/2 cup crème fraiche or sour cream, mixed with a tablespoon of fresh lime juice and a teaspoon of lime zest.

Heat the butter in a large stockpot, and add onions. Cook for about 5 minutes on low heat until they are translucent but not browned. Do not burn them.

Carefully cut the squash in half. Take care when doing this since the rind is tough. Remove the seeds-I find that a melon peeler works well. Cut the squash into chunks. Peel, quarter, and core the apples. Cut into chunks.

Add the squash and apples to the onions. Sauté for medium heat for about 10 minutes- until some of the squash starts to become golden. Keep stirring. Then add chicken broth, cider salt, and pepper to the pot. Bring to a boil, cover, and cook over low heat for 30 to 40 minutes, until the squash and apples are very soft. Add additional water if too thick. Use an immersion blender to puree – take pot off the heat if you are using this, or puree the soup in batches in a blender or food processor. Taste for salt and pepper. Reheat the soup, add fresh thyme leaves and serve hot. Garnish with the crème fraiche and lime. It will be smooth and slightly thick.

Serve with a simple green salad and crusty whole wheat bread, with extra virgin olive oil for dipping. YUM!

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#### ASK THE COOK!

This is the new column that I promised you in the last issue. This question was emailed to me and I thought that you would find it interesting, especially as the holiday party season gets under way...

*KB writes: I am not sure how many appetizers to serve at a cocktail party? And how many to serve before a dinner party? What works best?*

*MBG: There is a general rule of thumb that caterers use. Remember this is a general guideline.*

Cocktail Party: 12 appetizers (mixed) per person

Dinner Party: 6-8 (mixed) appetizers per person

- Be sure to mix the appetizers- there is nothing more boring than having the same appetizer being passed over and over. After two or three of the same type, we want something different.
- Mix up the kind of food- cheese, seafood, meat, vegetable. Everyone like a variety.
- If the guest list has fewer than 45 people, plan on using roughly 6 different appetizers; for more than 45 guests, 8 types.
- The rule of thumb for smaller gatherings is that 3 types are suitable for 8 to 10 guests; 4 or 5 types for 14 to 16 people.
- Having an equal number of hot and cold foods is also helpful so that while one appetizer is heating in the oven, a cold one can be circulating.

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

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### New Cookbook Progress

Last month I requested some stories that you would like to share for my new cookbook. While I have heard from a few of you, some of the readers thought that it was hard to write things down on paper. So I can easily call you up and interview you if that is more helpful. If you don't have last month's copy, here's the information.

*After a year or so of writing my first cookbook, I have decided, for a number of reasons, to change the direction. Something was not quite perfect about it. So, I am announcing that the new book is 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 am keeping the title under wraps for a while – websites, trademarks and all that, but it is focused on 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 met a wonderful graphic artist and designer in New York and she is working on a logo and book design for me.*

**AN INVITATION** - *You are invited to share your stories – 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](mailto:marybeth.gregg@verizon.net), and I will give you all of the details.*

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

Enjoy the best of the season!

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## ?????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](http://www.cook-with-confidence.com)

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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](http://www.cook-with-confidence.com)

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