

Duck makes a nice change from the same old favorites

It's here — that magical time of year when friends and family get together to share memories, catch up on what's new and create traditions that will in time be celebrated by the next generation.

With busy schedules, loads of after-school activities and the search for holiday gifts, how does a busy host have time to create menus with excitement and flair? Rather than falling back on the familiar, combine a new distinctive recipe idea or two into a menu that already is filled with special dishes reserved for the holidays.

For example, try duck instead of your usual holiday ham or turkey. Duck is easy to prepare, moist and succulent, and an incredibly creative choice because it takes on the flavors of other ingredients while cooking, like the distinctive contrasting flavors of Dijon mustard. The smooth texture and pungent flavor of a classic Dijon mustard enhances everything from salads to sauces and appetizers to entrees.

The holiday season is a time for celebration with moments set aside to relax and rekindle relationships. Bring food to your table that is as festive as the season and as memorable as the occasion. It's a great way to show family and guests your care.

Holiday entertaining tips

- Plan-ahead, always shop ahead of time and create menus that will not only serve your guests but serve you and your family the day after.

- Carry the color of the season right to your table using decorative accents such as pine cones, berries and even greenery that will bring the outdoors in. If flowers are not in your budget, consider arrangements of Christmas ornaments on a table, accenting the table with plaid ribbon.

- If you're short on entertaining space, and want to share the season with many family and friends, plan several smaller parties or get-togethers. A tree-trimming party can be followed with dessert. Or your office friends might enjoy a holiday brunch and "holiday-cookie exchange."

- Rely on seasonal vegetables and fruits such as squash, yams, apples, grapes, kumquats and oranges, as they will be plentiful and not difficult to locate.

- Count on make-ahead recipes for side dishes, and hors d'oeuvres that are simply heat and serve if you plan to make variety part of your menu.

- To make holiday parties extra special without adding too much expense, select a signature liqueur, such as B & B from France and use it to add flavor to everything from sauces to coffee and eggnog.

Tips for preparing duck

While most people shy away from including duck on their menu, duckling products are as versatile as other poultry. In fact, not only is duck comparable to chicken and turkey in terms of nutrition, if one removes the skin and fat the nutritional profile scores even higher than beef or other poultry.

These tips, provided by Maple Leaf Farms, the nation's leading duckling producer, will convince you to add "duckling, the poultry with pizzazz" to your next dinner.

- Whole duckling can be roasted, grilled, barbecued, prepared in a crock pot, quartered, or stir-fried.

- A whole duckling weighs 4 to 6 pounds and serves 2 to 4 people. If entertaining or serving a large family or holiday meal, prepare several ducklings, which will take up as much oven space as one larger bird.

- If duckling is frozen, thaw 24 hours in original package inside the refrigerator. It is not recommended that a bird be thawed in water. However, for quick thawing, it may be placed in a pan of cold water.

- Duckling will self-baste if before roasting, a sharp knife or fork is used to score the skin at one-inch intervals. Be careful not to prick the meat as this will cause the duckling to lose its natural juices and become dry.

- A trivet placed on the bottom of a roasting pan will help liquids drain.

- Cook duckling 30 to 35 minutes per pound at 350 degrees F. The internal temperature should reach 165

degrees F when measured with a meat thermometer.

- Rapidly reheat duckling in an oven to a minimum of 165 degrees F before serving.

Duck Cassoulet

Served with crusty rolls and a crisp salad, this recipe is great for a crowd of hungry friends after they've helped trim the tree!

Makes 4 to 6 servings
1 Tbsp. vegetable oil
1 (5 lb.) duck, cut into 8 pieces
1 lb. turkey sausage links, cut into 2-inch pieces

1 cup diced onions
1 Tbsp. chopped garlic
1 (28-oz.) can whole peeled tomatoes, diced and liquid reserved

1 (13 3/4-fluid oz.) can beef broth
1/2 cup B & B Liqueur
3 sprigs fresh thyme
2 bay leaves
1/3 cup Dijon mustard
2 (15-oz.) cans white beans, rinsed and drained

2 Tbsp. chopped fresh parsley
In 8-quart pot, over medium heat, heat oil. Place duck in pot, skin-side down; sear for 6 to 8 minutes or until golden brown.

Turn over duck pieces and cook for 4 to 6 minutes. Remove duck; pour off fat. In same pot, cook sausage for 8 to 10 minutes or until browned. Remove sausage; pour off all but 1 tablespoon fat.

In same pot, saute onions and garlic for 2 to 3 minutes or until golden. Add tomatoes with liquid, beef broth, liqueur, thyme, bay leaf and reserved meat. Heat to a boil; reduce heat to a simmer. Cover and cook over low heat for 1 hour. Remove bay leaves. Stir in mustard and beans. Cook for 15 minutes. Serve garnished with parsley.

Dijon Peppercorn Crusted Duck

Decidedly different, this recipe can be served family style accompanied by glazed carrots or acorn squash.

Makes 3 to 4 servings
1 (5 lb.) duck
1 Tbsp. vegetable oil
1/4 cup Dijon mustard
1/3 cup fresh bread crumbs
1 to 2 Tbsp. crushed peppercorn melange (black, pink, white and green peppercorns)

1 Tbsp. chopped fresh parsley.
Quarter duck; bone and remove skin from breast. In a large skillet, over medium heat, heat oil. Sear duck legs and breast in hot oil for 5 to 6 minutes per side or until golden brown. (Legs may take 2-3 minutes longer.) Transfer to a roasting pan and reserve rendered duck fat. Spread mustard over duck pieces. In small bowl, combine bread crumbs, peppercorns, parsley and 2 tablespoons reserved duck fat. Gently press crumb mixture on duck pieces. Roast at 400 degrees F for 30 minutes; remove breast pieces from oven and keep warm. Roast remaining duck pieces for 15 minutes more or until the internal temperature of the leg and thigh reach 165 degrees F. Serve hot.

Caramelized Onion Tartlets

This easy hors d'oeuvres recipe combines several unique flavors in a rich and satisfying welcome treat.

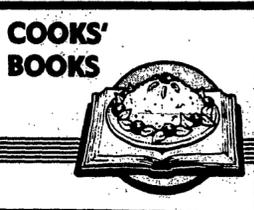
Makes 24 appetizers
2 1/2 cups chopped onions
5 Tbsp. margarine or butter, melted, divided
1/4 cup B & B Liqueur
1/4 cup heavy cream
1/2 cup shredded Gruyere cheese

3 Tbsp. Dijon mustard
2 Tbsp. chopped fresh parsley
8 sheets phyllo dough, defrosted

In skillet, over medium heat, saute onions in 1 tablespoon margarine or butter for 12 to 14 minutes or until golden. Add liqueur and cream. Heat to a boil; reduce heat and simmer until mixture thickens. Remove from heat; stir in cheese, mustard and parsley. Place 1 sheet of phyllo dough on a clean work surface; brush with some remaining margarine or butter. Top with another sheet of phyllo dough and brush with some margarine; repeat layering 2 more times. Cut layered phyllo dough into 12 squares. Place each piece of phyllo, margarine-side down, into 1 1/2 inch-muffin pan cups. Fill lined cup with 1 rounded teaspoon cheese mixture. Fold edges in and gently press down. Repeat with remaining phyllo and filling. Bake at 400 degrees F for 18 to 20 minutes or until golden brown. Remove from pan. Serve

hydrator for a few days. For longer storage, freeze in a plastic bag overwrapped with foil. Grate ginger, thin brown peel and all, as needed in desserts, sauces, stir-frys.

Store fresh ginger in a



Warm Creole Bread Pudding

Inspired by Christi Carter of The Carter House Inn, Eureka, Calif., this dessert says, "Thank you for being a guest at my table."

Makes 6 servings
8 oz. French bread, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
1/2 cup dried currants, chopped
dried apricots or dried cherries
3 cups milk
1 cup heavy or whipping cream
1/4 cup sugar
1/2 cup margarine or butter, melted

1/2 cup B & B Liqueur
2 eggs
2 tsp. vanilla extract
1 tsp. almond extract
1 tsp. ground nutmeg
Soft Whipped Cream, recipe follows

Mint sprigs, for garnish
In lightly greased 8-by-8-by-2-inch baking pan, combine bread cubes and currants, apricots or cherries; set aside. In large bowl, whisk together milk, cream, sugar, melted margarine or butter, liqueur, eggs, extracts and nutmeg; pour over bread mixture. Cover and chill 4 hours or overnight. Bake at 350 degrees F for 45 minutes or until set and golden brown. Cool slightly. Cut into squares. Serve warm topped with Soft Whipped Cream and garnished with mint sprigs.

Soft Whipped Cream: In small bowl, with electric mixer at high speed, beat 1/2 cup heavy or whipping cream until soft peaks form. Gently stir in 2 tablespoons B & B Liqueur and 1 tablespoon sugar.

Roast Duckling with Cherry Sauce

Guests will be impressed by the presentation of this main course and the subtle yet delicious flavor combinations are sure palate pleasers.

Makes 4 servings
1 (5 lb.) duck
Salt and pepper
1 1/2 cups B & B Liqueur, divided
1/2 cup red currant jelly
1/2 cup canned pitted dark sweet cherries, drained and halved

1 tsp. cornstarch
1 Tbsp. water
1 Tbsp. chopped fresh parsley
Salt and pepper, to taste

With a knife or fork, score or prick duck skin all over. Season with salt and pepper. Place duck in roasting pan; pour 1 cup liqueur over duck. Roast at 350 degrees F for 2 hours or until internal temperature of leg and thigh reaches 165 degrees F. Periodically remove pan drippings. Remove fat from drippings and discard fat. In saucepan, over high heat, heat remaining 1/2 cup liqueur and red currant jelly to a boil. Reduce heat; simmer until mixture thickens and is reduced to 1/4 cup. Brush duck with 1 tablespoon liqueur mixture. Place duck under broiler and cook until crisp. Remove duck and lightly tent with aluminum foil. Add duck drippings and cherries to remaining liqueur mixture. Heat to a boil; reduce heat to a simmer. Blend cornstarch and water; pour into simmering sauce, stirring until sauce thickens and begins to boil. Stir in parsley; season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve cherry sauce with duck.

Dijon Rosemary Roasted Potatoes

These potatoes can be served with a variety of main courses and are ideal for entertaining.

Makes 6 servings
1/2 cup olive oil
1/4 cup Dijon mustard
1 Tbsp. chopped fresh rosemary leaves or 1 tsp. dried rosemary leaves
2 cloves garlic, chopped
12 medium red bliss potatoes, quartered

In large bowl, whisk together oil, mustard, rosemary and garlic. Toss mixture with potatoes and place on a baking sheet. Bake at 400 degrees F for 1 hour or until golden and crispy, turning often. Serve hot.



Savory Roast Beef with Green Beans and Caramelized Onions

AP Photo

An alternative to turkey is a Savory Roast Beef

By The Associated Press

A beef roast is a classic choice for a holiday meal, and it's easy to prepare, even for the first-time "roaster." Actually, roasting is a simple three-step process:

- Heat oven to temperature specified in recipe.
- Place roast, straight from the refrigerator, fat side up, on rack in shallow roasting pan. Season beef before cooking, if desired. Insert meat thermometer into thickest part of roast, not resting in fat or touching bone. Do not add water or cover.
- Roast according to time and temperature specified in recipe. Transfer roast to carving board; tent loosely with aluminum foil. Let roast stand 15 minutes. Temperature will continue to rise 5 degrees F to 10 degrees F to reach desired doneness and roast will be easier to carve.

Savory beef roast is simple and easy to prepare. Press garlic and black pepper into lean beef roast and place in the oven. The roast cooks unwatched, leaving plenty of time to prepare the side dish, Green Beans and Caramelized Onions, made with convenient frozen green beans. Because the roast is boneless, carving will be a cinch.

Bakery rolls and a favorite dessert, either purchased or homemade, complete the easy, great-tasting holiday menu.

Savory Beef Roast

Total preparation and cooking time: 2 1/2 to 3 1/2 hours

3 cloves garlic, crushed
1/2 to 3/4 tsp. cracked black pepper
4- to 6-pound beef round tip roast, tied

For the sauce
12-oz. jar brown beef gravy
1/4 cup water
1/4 tsp. Worcestershire sauce

Heat oven to 325 degrees F. Combine garlic and pepper; press evenly into surface of beef roast. Place roast in shallow roasting pan. Insert meat thermometer so tip is centered in thickest part of roast, not resting in fat. Do not add water or cover. Roast in a 325-degree F oven for about 2 to 2 1/2 hours for medium-rare; 2 1/2 to 3 hours for medium doneness. Remove roast when meat thermometer registers 140 degrees F for medium-rare, 155 degrees F for medium. Transfer roast to carving board; tent loosely with aluminum foil. Let stand 15 minutes. The temperature will continue to rise to 145 degrees F for medium-rare, 160 degrees F for medium. Remove rack from roasting pan; stir sauce ingredients into pan drippings. Cook over medium-low heat for 3 to 5 minutes or until hot and bubbly, stirring occasionally. Carve roast into thin slices and serve with sauce. Serve with green beans and caramelized onions. Makes 7 servings.

Green Beans and Caramelized Onions
Total cooking and preparation time: 1 hour
4 slices bacon, cut into 1-inch pieces
2 large onions, about 1 lb. total, cut lengthwise into 1/2-inch thick wedges
16-oz. package frozen whole or French-cut green beans
2 Tbsp. red-wine vinegar
1 Tbsp. packed brown sugar
Salt and pepper

In a large nonstick skillet, cook bacon over medium heat 8 to 10 minutes or until crisp, stirring occasionally. Remove with slotted spoon; drain on paper towels. Pour off all but 2 tablespoons bacon drippings. Add onions; cook over medium-low heat 35 to 40 minutes or until very soft, stirring occasionally.

Meanwhile, prepare green beans according to package directions using salt. Keep warm. Stir vinegar and sugar into onions. Increase heat to medium-high; cook and stir 1 to 2 minutes or until liquid is evaporated. Stir in green beans and bacon; toss lightly. Season with salt and pepper, as desired. Serve immediately with Savory Beef Roast. Makes 7 servings.

Nutrition facts per serving:
108 cal., 3 g pro., 13 g carbo., 6 g fat, 0.9 mg iron, 230 mg sodium, 7 mg chol.

Recipes from: Meat Board Test Kitchens

Ginger is not a root — it's a rhizome

Cooks' proper terminology for ginger when it's purchased in the produce department is "fresh ginger," not ginger root. That's because fresh ginger is, technically, not a root but a rhizome, which is an

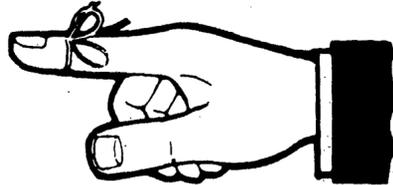
underground stem producing roots and leafy shoots.

A whole piece is called a "hand" of ginger because the branches look like fleshy fingers.

Store fresh ginger in a

hydrator for a few days. For longer storage, freeze in a plastic bag overwrapped with foil. Grate ginger, thin brown peel and all, as needed in desserts, sauces, stir-frys.

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