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3Bs Recipes (Bridge, Books and Bunco)

By Susie Iventosch

Exciting news ...it's Bunco night! Distressing news ... it's your turn to host. Yikes!

The perpetual problem possesses your thoughts: What, oh what to serve? It has to be delicious, it should be attractive, and it's best if prepared ahead-with minimal effort once the guests arrive. After all, you want to play too!

A couple of weeks ago, I received an email requesting some main dish ideas for just such gatherings.

"Many Lamorinda ladies are involved in Book, Bridge and Bunco groups," wrote Constance Clayburn of Moraga. "I would love to see some 'main dish' ideas and serving suggestions published in the Lamorinda Weekly, that are apropos to the season."

Clayburn said that these types of groups normally meet on a monthly basis, and the gatherings are anywhere from eight to 12 people. The hostess generally prepares the entire meal when it is her turn to host the event, but prefers dishes that can be prepared ahead of time, so she, too, may join in the fun!

"Everyone is thinking 'healthy' and 'low calorie', yet still tasty and attractive," Clayburn added. "It's the age-old 'what to serve' dilemma!"

Pouring over recipes, I came up with all sorts of rich, calorie-laden ideas, like lobster-Gruyere macaroni and cheese (heavenly), or homemade chicken pot pies, divine, but tough to make low-cal. Then I thought of a recipe a friend gave me long ago, that combines orzo pasta with Ortega chilies and cheese. Everyone I've ever served it to has absolutely loved it. And, it can be made in a low-cal version by using non-fat sour cream and reduced calorie cheese. Add a seasonal touch by serving an arugula- roasted pumpkin salad, garnished with pomegranate seeds, nuts and blue cheese. By adding roasted turkey or chicken, this salad can become a healthy and festive main course, too.

Then, there is always the amazing Chicken Marbella from the Silver Palate cookbook. This dish, made with olives, prunes, capers and brown sugar, is baked in a lovely marinade of wine, olive oil, herbs and wine vinegar, is really best served at room temperature, anyway!

For vegetarians, a stuffed eggplant with a walnut-wheat-germ-Parmesan crust is to die for- and a meal in itself. And, and for crisp fall evenings, pumpkin bisque served in individual hallowed out pumpkins is an especially fun treat, too! You just need a short "time-out" for everyone to ladle their own pumpkin-ful. Actually, come to think of it, the arugula salad and pumpkin soup would team up for a delicious dinner pair, too.

I'll keep looking for more ideas, but here is a start! If anyone has a great recipe for the 3Bs they'd like to share, please email me and I will try to publish it!

Baked Orzo-Ortega Chile Casserole



Photo Susie Iventosch

Makes one 9x13 casserole

My friend Shawn made this dish for us before we ever had kids. Now, some 25 years later, it is still one of our family's favorite pasta dishes. My son used to think this dish was the absolute definition of the word "casserole." It wasn't until he was in his teens that he realized that "casserole" was a type of dish, not orzo pasta with chilies and cheese!

It can be made with brown or brown/wild rice, too, for those who prefer grains to pasta, but it is just a little more dense and slightly less puffy.

Ingredients

1 1/2 cups orzo (rice-shaped pasta) or rice

1 1/2 cups grated Monterey Jack cheese, or Pepper

Jack (can use low-calorie version)

1/2 cup diced, mild Ortega chilies

1 red bell pepper, diced

1 cup sour cream (can use non-fat or low-fat sour cream)

1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese

Directions

Preheat oven to 400F. In a large pot of boiling water,

cook orzo to al dente. Drain and place in a large bowl. Mix

cooked orzo with one 1 cup of the Jack cheese, red bell pepper, chilies and 1/2 cup of the sour cream. Stir well.

Spread into greased 9x13 inch baking dish. (You can certainly do individual ramekins, if you prefer.) Spread remaining sour cream in a thin, even layer on top and sprinkle with remaining Jack and Parmesan cheeses. Bake for approximately 20 minutes, or until slightly puffed and cheese is browned.

If there are any leftovers, which is unlikely, they make a terrific lunch to take to work or school, or it can be frozen for another busy day.

Arugula salad with roasted pumpkin, toasted hazelnuts or pecans, pomegranate seeds, bleu cheese and Blood Orange Vinaigrette



Photo Susie Iventosch

pretty salad, so a glass bowl makes a nice presentation.)

Toss with vinaigrette and serve at once!

*To cook pumpkin, heat oven to 375F and spray roasting pan with cooking spray or brush with olive oil. Cut baking pumpkin in half, scoop out seeds and drizzle inside of pumpkin halves with olive oil. Place, cut side down, in roasting pan and bake for approximately 15-20 minutes, or until a knife will easily pierce through skin and meat. Remove from oven. Cool and remove skin. Cut pumpkin into bite-sized pieces and toss with salt and pepper to season. Refrigerate until ready to use.

Photo Susie Iventosch

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Salad Ingredients

- 4 cups rocket-leaf arugula
- 1/3 cup pomegranate seeds
- 1/4 cup crumbled blue cheese
- 1 cup cubed, roasted pumpkin*
- 1/3 cup toasted hazelnuts or pecan halves
- Blood Orange Vinaigrette
- 1/3+ cup extra virgin olive oil (add a little more or less, depending upon your tastes)
- 2 tablespoons Blood Orange vinegar (Cuisine Perel makes this)
- 2 tablespoons white wine vinegar
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 1/2 teaspoon onion powder
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/2 teaspoon white pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon sea salt

Directions

Place arugula, pumpkin, pomegranate seeds, blue cheese and pecans in a glass salad bowl. (This is a very