

# Home on the Range

## Make-Ahead Appetizers Put You A Step Ahead

Take the hassle out of the holiday entertaining dilemma.

Host an appetizer party. Sara Reddington, director of the Beef and Veal Culinary Center of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, suggests a combination of convenient purchased items along with one or two homemade.

Choose a recipe such as Mini Holiday Beef Crescents. Make these flavorful tidbits with prepared refrigerated pie crust, cut into wedges, and then topped with a ground beef, dried tart cherry, pepper-jack cheese filling. Roll-up, bake and freeze. A quick reheating is all you need at party time.

Another time-honored party favorite is meatballs and dip, a hit with kids and adults, depending on the dip.

Reddington saves time by starting with heat-and-serve frozen beef meatballs. The biggest decision is what to dip the in. That's simple, too, because there are myriad prepared options from which to choose.

More basic choices include barbecue sauce, marinara sauce, nacho cheese sauce or ranch dressing. For more sophisticated palates choose Thai peanut sauce, blue cheese dressing or salsa.

### Mini Holiday Beef Crescents

- 1 pound ground beef
  - 1 1/2 cups shredded jalapeno pepper cheese or Monterey Jack cheese
  - 1/2 cup chopped dried cherries
  - 2 tablespoons apple juice
  - 2 teaspoons ground cumin
  - 1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
  - 1 1/2 packages (15 ounces each) refrigerated pie crusts (3 crusts)
  - 1 egg, slightly beaten
  - 1 teaspoon water
- Heat oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit. Brown ground beef in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat 8 to 10 minutes or until beef is not pink, breaking up into small crumbles. Pour off drippings. Stir in cheese, cherries, juice, cumin and garlic powder; set aside.

Cut each pie crust into 12 wedges. Place 1 packed, rounded tablespoon beef mixture on wide end of each wedge.

Beginning at wide ends, roll up wedges; curve ends to form crescents. Place 1-inch apart on 2 greased baking sheets.

Combine egg and water in small bowl. Lightly brush over tops of crescents. Bake in 400 de-

grees Fahrenheit oven 15 to 18 minutes or until golden brown. Serve warm.

Makes 36 appetizers. Total preparation and cooking time: 1 hour.

**Cook's Tip:** To make crescents ahead, prepare and bake as directed; cool. Wrap tightly; freeze for up to 2 weeks. To reheat, place on lightly greased baking sheets. Bake in 350 degree Fahrenheit oven 12 to 13 minutes or until heated.

Add purchased mixed olives, seasoned nuts, cheeses, fruits, crudites with dip, marinated mushrooms and artichokes from the supermarket to round out the menu.

And, don't forget dessert. Decorated holiday cookies help carry out the festive theme. Brownie bites, dusted with confectioners' sugar will satisfy the craving for chocolate. Eggnog? Purchase it, pour into a pitcher or punch bowl, sprinkle with freshly grated nutmeg and you're set.

Finally, remember what a difference a garnish makes. Reddington says take some tips from chefs. A sprinkling of chopped parsley, chives or bell pepper does wonders to enliven a presentation. Sprinkle dip with minced chives or the rim of a crudite platter with minced parsley. Star fruit slices make a natural garnish for a fruit tray. Add a sprig of rosemary or thyme to mixed olives — you get the idea.

Most of all, plan foods that you will feel good about preparing and serving to your guests, and of course, that they will enjoy eating.

### Party Pointers

(NAPS) — Entertaining for large groups, be it family affairs or for friends, can be stressful. The logistics alone might be daunting. Where do I seat everyone? Do I have enough chairs? What to do with the food...do I need a buffet? How about a beverage station?

When you need that extra seating, table, or serving buffet, it can be as easy as unfolding some tables and chairs.

With this in mind, here are some of my party pointers and easy entertaining ideas that will ensure your next event will be an organized and successful affair.

#### Setting The Scene:

- For large parties of 20, try using two tables in a "T" pattern...great for lively conversation.



Beef Tenderloin Sandwiches with Nutty Herb-Cheese Spread and Caramelized Onion Relish add an elegant touch to a New Year's party.

• Extra seating is a snap with folding chairs.

• The Lifetime® Adjustable Tables are perfect for a tall bar...or a low "Kiddie" table.

#### Easy Entertaining Ideas:

- Pick a "theme" and color to carry throughout your party. Purchase fabrics from outlets, and make your invitations on the computer using colored paper.
- Build a beautiful buffet with different heights: Use metal risers, upturned bowls or terra cotta pots — covered with cloths, to create different levels.

• For larger tables, think big for decoration: big bowls of lemons, tall vases with branches towering over the buffet, big pots of fresh herbs, fruits and flowers.

• Breads tumbling out of wicker baskets laid on their sides.

• For a sit-down affair centerpiece, bring the outdoors in...arranging branches and leaves (magnolias work great) down the center of the table, creating a garland effect, then nestle fruits, vegetables and herbs in an around the leaves.

• Place votives or tea light candles in juice glasses and tuck into garland. Great solution if you are on a budget.

• Try "dressing up" the chairs by wrapping the backs with a complementing fabric and tie the back with a "nosegay" of leaves and herbs.

• Be realistic about what you can and can't do.

If you are on a tight budget, look around you for what is seasonal and accessible. Don't be afraid to use your imagination. (A bucket of paint and some old sheets can create a wonderful table covering. Or just use giant philodendron leaves to decorate.

It doesn't have to be expensive, but rather a reflection of you having fun entertaining.

#### Catering For Company:

- Have a good invitation...this sets "the stage" for your party.
- Plan the menu two weeks in advance. Do easy "do-ahead" dishes, thinking about the freshest ingredients, balance of flavors and how it will all look on the plate.
- Make as much as you can ahead of time and freeze or refrigerate. (Breads, rolls, sauces, etc.)
- Find out any dietary restrictions ahead of time and try to accommodate.

## Featured Recipe

### BEEF TENDERLOIN SANDWICHES

- 1 center-cut beef tenderloin roast (2-3 pounds), not tied
- 1/2 cup sun-dried tomato spread
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped parsley
- Assorted breads and rolls
- Nutty herb-cheese spread (recipe follows)
- Caramelized Onion Relish (recipe follows)

Heat oven to 425 degrees. Make horizontal cut through center of beef roast, parallel to surface of meat. Cut to, but not through, opposite side. Open meat so it lies flat.

Combine sun-dried tomato spread and parsley. Spread lengthwise on half of meat. Fold other half of meat over to form original shape of roast. Tie at 1/2-2-inch intervals with kitchen twine; trim off excess twine.

Place roast on rack in shallow roasting pan. Insert ovenproof meat thermometer so it is centered in thickest part of beef, not resting in sun-dried tomato filling. Roast in 425 degree oven 35-40 minutes for medium rare.

Remove roast when meat thermometer registers 135 degrees. Transfer roast to carving board; tent loosely with aluminum foil. Let stand 10 minutes. (Temperature will continue to rise about 10 degrees to reach 145 degrees for medium rare). Refrigerate roast several hours or until chilled. If desired, roast can be wrapped tightly in aluminum foil and refrigerated up to 2 days. Carve roast into 1/4-inch thick slices.

Assemble sandwiches as desired with breads, spread and relish. Makes 30-35 appetizer servings.

#### Nutty Herb-Cheese Spread:

- 1/2 cup salted shelled pistachios or slivered blanched almonds
- 6 1/2-ounces garlic and herb cheese spread
- Half-and-half

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Spread nuts in single layer in baking pan. Bake in 350 degree oven about 5 minutes for pistachios or 8 minutes for almonds until lightly toasted, cool slightly. Coarsely chop.

Combine cheese spread and nuts. Stir in enough half-and-half to thin to spreading consistency. Makes 1 cup.

#### Caramelized Onion Relish

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 4 cups thinly sliced onions
- cloves garlic, minced
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1 tablespoon packed brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar

Heat oil in large non-stick skillet over medium heat until hot. Add onions, garlic, salt and pepper. Cook 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in brown sugar and vinegar; cook, and stir until butter has evaporated. Makes 1/4 cup.

## Recipe Topics

If you have recipes for topics listed below, please share them with us. We welcome your recipes, but ask that you include accurate measurements, a complete list of ingredients, and clear instructions with each recipe you submit. Be sure to include your name and address. Recipes should reach our office one week before the publishing date listed below.

Send your recipes to Lou Ann Good, Lancaster Farming, P.O. Box 609, Ephrata, PA 17522.

- January
- 4 — Warm Up With Soup
  - 11 — Make It With Coffee
  - 18 — Make It Healthy
  - 25 — Breads, Muffins, More

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