

December

North Carolina and the holidays go hand in hand. I just love the smell of that fresh tree in the house while we are decorating. I know it makes a little mess but it is well worth it. Not to mention all the varieties of beautiful poinsettia's we grow. They are just bursting with color and bring the holidays to life. And we can't forget the smell of all the delicious food made with fresh ingredients grown or produced right here. So let North Carolina awaken all your senses this holiday season.

COLD OVEN POUND CAKE

2 sticks margarine
3 cups sugar
1/2 cup Crisco
3 cups plain flour
1-cup milk
1 tsp. vanilla
1 tsp. butternut extract
1 tsp. lemon extract
Pinch of salt
6 eggs

Cream together shortening (butter and Crisco), gradually add sugar and cream well. Beat in eggs, one at the time. Add flavoring. Mix in milk and flour with salt at 3 different times. Mix well.

Put in greased and floured tube pan and place in a cold oven. Bake at 325 for 1 hour and 15 minutes. Optional: dust top with sugar at 1 hour and continue baking for final 15 minutes.

PERSONAL Note: A good friend of mine, Eleanor Stephenson, gave this recipe to me right after I got married and I have been making it for the past 15 years. This is a go to recipe when I need a dessert but don't have time to go to the store because these ingredients are usually in the house. Try a slice toasted in the morning for breakfast, delicious!

RIBEYE ROAST WITH DIJON CRUST AND ROASTED GREEN BEANS

Total preparation and cooking time: 2-1/2 to 3-1/4 hours

1 well-trimmed beef ribeye roast, small end (4 to 6 pounds)
1/2 cup Dijon-style mustard

2-1/3 cups cheese and garlic *or* Caesar croutons, finely crushed (about 1-1/4 cups crumbs), divided

1-1/2 pounds green beans, trimmed

1-tablespoon olive oil

1. Heat oven to 350°F. Spread mustard evenly over all surfaces of beef roast. Press 1 cup crouton crumbs evenly onto roast over mustard.
 2. Place roast, fat side up, on rack in shallow roasting pan. Insert ovenproof meat thermometer so tip is centered in thickest part of beef, not resting in fat. Do not add water or cover. Roast in 350°F oven 1-3/4 to 2 hours for medium rare; 2 to 2-1/2 hours for medium doneness.
 3. Meanwhile toss green beans with oil on metal baking sheet. Add remaining 1/4 cup crouton crumbs; toss to coat. Roast in 350°F oven with beef roast 30 minutes.
 4. Remove roast when meat thermometer registers 135°F for medium rare; 150°F for medium. Increase oven temperature to 450°F; continue roasting green beans 10 to 20 minutes or until tender and starting to brown.
 5. Transfer roast to carving board; tent loosely with aluminum foil. Let stand 15 to 20 minutes. (Temperature will continue to rise about 10°F to reach 145°F for medium rare; 160°F for medium.)
 6. Carve roast into slices. Season beef and green beans with salt and pepper, as desired.
- Makes 6 to 8 servings.***

Cook's Tip: To make crouton crumbs, place croutons in food-safe plastic bag; close bag securely, squeezing out air. Crush croutons with rolling pin to form crumbs. Or, place croutons in food processor container. Cover; process until crumbs form.

Nutrition information per serving (1/6 of recipe): 463 calories; 19 g fat (5 g saturated fat; 7 g monounsaturated fat); 129 mg cholesterol; 783 mg sodium; 15 g carbohydrate; 0.5 g fiber; 54 g protein; 15 mg niacin; 1.1 mg vitamin B6; 2.8 mcg vitamin B12; 4.8 mg iron; 60.3 mcg selenium; 9.6 mg zinc.

This recipe is an excellent source of protein, niacin, vitamin B6, vitamin B12, iron, selenium and zinc.

PERSONAL Note: I know a Ribeye roast can be an expensive piece of meat so watch for it to be on sale. Also, remember this is the holidays and it feeds 6-8 guests so it really is worth it.

CHOCOLATE COVERED PEANUTS

2 - 16 oz jars lightly salted dry roasted peanuts

8 blocks white bark (found in the baking isle)

1 - 12 oz bag semi sweet chocolate chips

1 - 12 oz bag milk chocolate chips

In crock pot:

Pour peanuts into crock-pot making a little well in the center

Pour chocolate chips in center

Place white bark on top of chocolate chips

*Do not let any chocolate touch the sides or bottom of the crock-pot

Cook on LOW for 1 1/4 hours until chocolate begins to melt

Stir well to coat peanuts. Spoon onto waxed paper in the size you want the peanut clusters to be. They will harden in about an hour. Can put on cookie sheets and place in refrigerator to speed up the hardening process.

PERSONAL Note: This recipe was sent to me from Emily Betts who got it from Judy Haire, don't you just love a small town? They make it in a round crock-pot and do place the white bark up the sides still cooking it on low but for 2 1/4 hours. That did not work for me so you have 2 options depending on your crock-pot.

HOLIDAY CHEESEBALL

2-8oz. cream cheese

5 Tbsp. (6 oz.) orange marmalade with champagne, or you can just use orange marmalade

4 Tbsp. (4 oz.) cranberry chutney

1/2 cup chopped pecans

Pecan halves or 1 cup chopped pecans

Mix all ingredients together except pecan halves or 1 cup chopped pecans and shape into pinecone, 1 large ball or 2 small balls. Place on wax paper and chill for 3-4 hours. Re-shape into better form and then cover with pecan halves for pinecone (with rosemary at top) or roll ball(s) in chopped pecans. Serve with crackers or wheat thins.

PERSONAL Note: This cheese ball reminds me of spiced cider or something we used to call wasil. The North Carolina pecans really make this recipe.