

FUN PARTY FOODS

Easy, Flavorful and Festive

by Renée Loux



Make the most of being a host with party foods sure to wow guests. Combining classic concepts with tasty twists will satisfy any gourmet in search of a fabulous holiday buffet. Whether you are a year-round or seasonal party planner, these crowd-pleasing appetizers will make you the toast of the celebration circuit.

Butternut Squash Spread with Baked Spelt Crisps

A festive, flavorful spread perks up any table, and this one commands attention with its gorgeous golden color. Butternut squash is loaded with antioxidant vitamins A and C, carotenoid antioxidants, potassium and manganese. Plus, it is simple to make and serve. For an innovative use of leftovers, add 1 cup of vegetable broth or stock to 1 cup of the prepared recipe, mix well and warm up for a satisfying serving of smooth soup.

Yields: about 4 cups (dairy-free)

1 medium butternut squash
(about 6 cups of cubes)
2 Tbsp olive oil
1 clove garlic, finely minced
1 tsp maple syrup (optional)
1 tsp finely grated ginger
2 tsp fresh thyme leaves (or 1 tsp dried thyme leaves)
1 tsp fresh rosemary, chopped finely
(or ½ tsp dried rosemary)
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Peel squash, cut in half lengthwise and scoop out seeds with a spoon.

Cut into 1-inch cubes. Place in a medium-large saucepan and cover with filtered water plus 2 inches. Bring to a boil, and then reduce heat to simmer for 6-9 minutes or until tender and easily pierced with a fork.

Drain liquid and let cool until comfortable to handle. Reserve the liquid for other uses such as making a vegetable stock or watering houseplants.

Place cooked squash in a food processor with olive oil, garlic, ginger, thyme, rosemary, a scant teaspoon of sea salt and some freshly ground black pepper. Blend until very smooth. Season further to taste with sea salt and pepper as needed.

Serve with crisps, crackers, whole-grain bread or crudité vegetables.

Store any leftovers in a sealed container in the fridge for up to 3-4 days.

Baked Spelt Crisps

Easy, homemade crisps are delightfully crunchy and contain less oil than nearly anything available for purchase in a bag, plus the oil is of a high quality. Spelt (an ancient variety of wheat) contains more nutrients and less gluten than standard wheat. Look for whole wheat spelt tortillas for optimum flavor, fiber and nutrition.

Yields: about 3 dozen crisps

4 spelt tortillas (9-inch), preferably made from whole wheat spelt
Extra-virgin olive oil, as needed
Pinch of sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Preheat oven to 350° F.

Using a mister or pastry brush, mist or brush both sides of each tortilla with olive oil.

Stack the tortillas and cut the stack into 8 wedges.

Arrange resulting triangles in a single layer on baking sheets and sprinkle with sea salt and freshly ground black pepper.

Bake for 6-7 minutes, or until crisp and turning golden. Watch carefully after 5 minutes to avoid burning.

Let cool before serving; they get crispier as they cool.

Sweet Potato Rolls with Haricot Verts & Pecan Pesto

This party favorite is sumptuous enough to be considered a small plate entrée when served on a bed of wild rice. Sweet potatoes are a rich source

of antioxidant beta-carotene (provitamin A), vitamin C, minerals and hunger-quenching fiber. Haricot verts (small and slender immature bean pods) are abundant in bone-building vitamin K, silica, calcium, magnesium and phosphorous. Soaking the pecans for the pesto makes them lighter, more digestible and yields delicious, nutritious results.

Yields: 10-12 rolls (dairy-free, gluten-free)

Sweet Potato Wrapper

2 sweet potatoes, peeled
2 tsp olive oil
Pinch of sea salt
Several fresh basil leaves, torn in half (to roll inside)

Preheat oven to 350° F.

Peel the sweet potato and cut the ends off.

Slice thinly, lengthwise. If the potato is long, first cut it in half across the middle.

Lay pieces flat on a baking sheet.

Bake 10 minutes until soft.

Allow to cool and gently rub with a drizzle of olive oil and a pinch of salt.

If wrappers must stand for any length of time, cover after cooled.



Haricot Verts or Green Beans

30 haricot verts or 18 green beans, cut in half and sliced lengthwise
2 tsp tamari or soy sauce
1 tsp umeboshi plum vinegar
½ tsp agave nectar or maple syrup
Enough filtered water just to cover the veggies in a small saucepan

Haricot verts are thin enough to leave whole. If using green beans, slice in half lengthwise. If green beans are extra-long, cut them in half before slicing.

Place haricot verts or sliced green beans in a small saucepan.

Mix together tamari or soy sauce, umeboshi plum vinegar and agave nectar or maple syrup and drizzle over the vegetables.

Add just enough filtered water to cover the beans.

Bring to a gentle simmer uncovered over medium heat. Reduce the heat to low and cook for 5-10 minutes, or just until tender. Do not disturb the veggies by stirring while they cook; they should remain firm. When tender, remove from the liquid with tongs and set aside in a bowl.

Continue cooking the liquid, stirring occasionally until it is reduced and the resulting marinade becomes syrupy. Pour over haricot verts or green beans and toss to coat. Let stand while preparing the remainder of the dish.

Pecan Pesto

¼ cup pecans, soaked for 1 hour
3 cups packed basil leaves
1 Tbsp walnut oil or extra-virgin olive oil
½ tsp sea salt
3-4 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil

Soak pecans in 1 cup filtered water for 1 hour.

Drain and rinse. Pat dry with a clean towel.

In a food processor, place drained pecans, basil, walnut oil and salt, and then pulse until finely chopped. With the motor running, add olive oil in a slow stream until well incorporated, but the mixture still has a bit of texture.

Assembly

Lay 2 pieces of softened sweet potato skins on a cutting board (not touching, with short end facing you, and the length of the sweet potato placed away from you). It is best to lay a few pairs at once to create an assembly line for quicker rolling.

Lay haricot verts or green beans across a piece of sweet potato, and top with a teaspoon or two of pesto.

Fold the short end of the softened potato skin over the vegetables and roll closed. Note the tendency to overpack and the fact that less is more; it will be easier to eat and go further.

Roll the second sweet potato slice around the bundle and secure with a toothpick.

Follow suit until all ingredients are used.

Eat the rolls as is, or bake at 350° F for 10-12 minutes to warm.

Garnish with freshly ground black pepper.



reserves for the body. White truffle oil (olive oil infused with white truffles) is a secret weapon for injecting sumptuous, sophisticated flavor, although the recipe is excellent without it.

Yields: about 3 cups (raw-living, dairy-free, gluten-free, low-glycemic)

1 1/2 cups raw almonds, soaked for 8 hours and drained
6-7 Tbsp lemon juice, or as needed
3-4 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil, or as needed
2-3 tsp white truffle oil, as needed
1/2 to 1 small clove garlic, finely minced
1 tsp sea salt, or to taste
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
1/4 to 1/3 cup filtered water, or as needed to blend to desired consistency
1/3 cup chopped parsley leaves
1/4 cup chopped basil leaves
3 Tbsp chopped sorrel (optional)
2-3 Tbsp chopped chives

Soak almonds in 3 cups of filtered water for 8 hours. Drain and rinse in a colander.

Place almonds in a food processor. Add lemon juice, olive oil, truffle oil, garlic, a scant teaspoon of salt and some freshly ground pepper. Blend, dribbling in water to aid processing as needed until mixture is as smooth as possible. Add more olive oil, lemon juice and water to thin to a preferred consistency. Add herbs and blend in pulses until well incorporated, but bits of herbs are still visible.

Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Serve with crudité vegetables and/or healthy crackers.



Almond Truffle & Herb Paté

This simple paté bursts with flavor and good-for-us nutrients. Almonds are a champion source of calcium and a clean source of protein and healthy fats. Soaking the almonds plumps them, wakes up enzymes and makes them more digestible, also supplying more alkaline

Endive Cups with Pine Nut Crème Fraîche, Figs and Olives

Little boats of enhanced endive are bites of pure delight. Creamy pine nuts are rich in healthy fats, including pinolenic, an essential fatty acid that curbs the appetite by triggering hunger-suppressing enzymes. Olives are loaded with iron, antioxidant vitamin E and a special phytonutrient, hy-

droxytyrosol, which helps keep bones strong. Fresh figs provide potassium and healthy fiber.

Yields: 2 dozen or so (raw-living, dairy-free, gluten-free, low-glycemic)

Pine Nut Crème Fraîche

2 cups pine nuts
¼ cup lemon juice, plus a bit as needed
1 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
Filtered water as needed
Sea salt
3 heads endive
6 fresh figs
1 cup Kalamata olives
2 Tbsp torn cilantro leaves (optional)
1 Tbsp chopped tarragon leaves (optional)
Flaked sea salt
Freshly ground black pepper

Place the pine nuts, lemon juice, olive oil and pinch of salt in a food processor or high-speed blender. Blend until ultra-smooth, adding a tablespoon or two of filtered water as necessary to achieve the correct consistency. It should be very smooth, like a thick sour cream, and will thicken more when chilled. (The crème fraîche mixture may be stored in a tightly sealed container in the fridge for up to 2 days.)

Separate the endive leaves.

Trim the figs and cut into thin wedges.

Pit the olives and chop roughly.

Spoon a dollop of crème fraîche onto each endive leaf and spread. Top with fig wedges and chopped olives. Sprinkle with torn cilantro and tarragon leaves, if desired, and a sprinkle of flaked sea salt and freshly ground black pepper.

Serve immediately.

Rosemary Sable Squares

These crisp and crumbly squares have a texture like shortbread and a savory and slightly sweet flavor, with the delicate fragrance of rosemary. Oats are rich in heart-healthy beta-glucan fiber, as well as the antioxidant selenium. Almonds are abundant in antioxidant vitamin E and healthy fats.

Yields: about 2 dozen squares (dairy-free, egg-free, low in gluten)

1 cup whole oats
1 cup slivered almonds
½ cup spelt flour
½ cup whole wheat pastry flour
½ tsp baking powder
½ tsp sea salt
3 Tbsp fresh rosemary needles, roughly chopped
½ cup safflower oil
¼ cup maple syrup
¼ cup agave nectar
2 Tbsp brown sugar (optional)
1 tsp vanilla extract

Preheat oven to 375° F.

In a medium bowl, mix in oats, almonds, baking powder, salt and rosemary.

In a separate medium-large bowl, whisk together oil, maple syrup, agave nectar, brown sugar (if desired for a touch more sweetness) and vanilla, until emulsified.

Add the wet mixture into the dry mixture and stir until dough forms.

Let stand for 10 minutes for flavor to develop and for absorption of moisture.

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper (unbleached is recommended, or grease with safflower oil).

Using wet hands, press ⅓ of dough until it is spread evenly and thinly; ¼-inch-thick bare spots occur where the dough is too thin. (Spreading the dough evenly is the key to uniform

cooking to avoid over-browned and/or undercooked sections.)

Cook 12 minutes or until golden brown.

Let cool 3-5 minutes and cut into squares while still warm and soft.

The squares will become crisp and flaky when thoroughly cool, so cut them to size while they are still warm and pliable.





Pear & Pomegranate Seed Guacamole

This festive guacamole fuses spicy, sweet and savory flavors in a colorful array of texture. Avocados are rich in skin-beautifying oils, pears supply vitamin C and copper, and sweet-tart pomegranates are among the most antioxidant-rich fruits on Earth.

Yields: about 4 servings (raw-living, dairy-free, gluten-free)

2 avocados, cubed
2 Tbsp lime juice
½ tsp sea salt, or to taste
3 Tbsp finely chopped red onion
1 chili pepper, finely chopped (add only to desired spiciness)
½ cup pear, peeled and finely diced
½ cup pomegranate seeds

In a bowl, mash together the avocados, lime juice, sea salt, red onion and chili pepper with a fork. It should exhibit small chunks, with texture.

Reserve 2 tablespoons of pomegranate seeds for garnish.

Fold remainder of pomegranate seeds and pear into the avocado mixture.

Season to taste with salt if needed.

Garnish with pomegranate seeds and serve.

Tuscan Kale Chips

Crunchy kale chips are super-simple to make and bursting with flavor. Kale is one of the most nutritious foods by weight; rich in blood-building vitamin K and antioxidant vitamins A and C, as well as minerals such as calcium and iron and satisfying fiber. Roasting the kale brings out a near-addictive nutty flavor.

Yields: 6-8 cups chips (dairy-free, gluten-free, low-glycemic)

1 bunch kale, leaf ribs removed, and roughly chopped
1 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
Sprinkle of sea salt

Preheat the oven to 250° F.

Toss the kale with olive oil in a large bowl.

Arrange in a single layer on a pair of baking sheets and sprinkle with sea salt.

Bake 30-33 minutes, or until crisp. Allow to cool completely to crisp before serving

Recipes are from The Balanced Plate and Living Cuisine, by Renée Loux and ReneeLoux.com.

PARTY-HOSTING TIPS

- Create identification cards for appetizers.
- Decorate the buffet table with form and function using seasonal fruits, vegetables and small evergreen sprays.
- Double-line the kitchen trashcan, in order to catch any drips and to save time from having to hunt for another bag after the first one fills up.
- Provide a small trashcan and a recycle bin in an easy-to-find place for guests.
- Use washable plates, cups and cutlery and cloth napkins. If opting for disposables, look for tree-free bagasse plates (from sugarcane fiber), bioplastic cutlery and napkins made from recycled content.