

Gathering of the Gourmets

Written by Debbi Covington
Tuesday, 02 February 2010 12:21



Calling all pampered palates! Are you interested in creating a Gourmet Society? Gourmet supper clubs can be a lot of fun! Some groups are called gourmet clubs; some are called dinner clubs. No matter what they're called, they unite groups of people who share a passion for preparing and sharing fine food. Each group is different. Some like to be adventurous and experiment with new cuisines or gourmet ingredients. Another group may decide to serve ethnic meals after research on a given country. In some cases the group cooks the entire meal in the home of one of its members. Other clubs ask members to bring the dishes ready to be served. The typical size of these groups range from 8 to 12 members. Select your group carefully. "The cult of gourmets, like marriage, is not to be entered into lightly." Here are some tips for organizing and running your own Gourmet Society: Invite friends who share similar food interests and skill levels to join the club. You don't want novices to be intimidated by professional chefs in the group. Determine a set schedule for the club in advance, such as the second Saturday of every month. Decide how the menus will be planned and where the food will be cooked. Establish how many courses will be served, and how they will rotate among members. Discuss whether budget is a consideration, and if so, what it will be. Agree on whether alcoholic beverages will be on the menu, and if yes, whether everyone will contribute alcohol to each meal or take turns. Meet every six months to determine whether the group is happy with how things are proceeding and whether any changes need to be made. Happy Cooking!

Cognac Scented Liver Pate

1 pound chicken livers

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½ pound fresh mushrooms, sliced

1/3 cup minced green onions

1 clove garlic, minced

1 teaspoon paprika

¼ cup butter

1/3 cup dry white wine

¼ teaspoon dill weed

4 drops hot sauce

½ cup butter, softened

¼ cup cognac

1 teaspoon salt

1/3 cup chopped parsley

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Saute chicken livers, mushrooms, green onions, garlic, and paprika in 1/4 cup butter. Add white wine, dill, and hot sauce. Cover and cook over low heat 10 minutes. Cool. Puree mixture in a food processor until blended and light in texture. Stir in 1/2 cup softened butter, cognac, and salt. Spoon into desired serving container. Garnish with chopped parsley. Serves 12.

Goat Cheese Salad

1/4 cup orange juice

3 tablespoons white wine vinegar

1/8 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon ground white pepper

1/3 cup vegetable oil

1/4 cup olive oil

6 ounces goat cheese, cut into 1/4-inch thick slices

8 cups mixed salad greens

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Fresh raspberries, blueberries, or blackberries

Combine first 4 ingredients in container of an electric blender. With blender on high, gradually add oils in a slow steady stream, processing until blended. Place goat cheese slices on a lightly greased baking sheet. Heat in a preheated 300 degree oven for 4 to 5 minutes. Toss salad greens with vinaigrette. Arrange salad greens and warm goat cheese slices on individual salad plates. Garnish with fresh berries. Serves 6.

Praline Muffins with Cranberry Butter

For the butter:

2 sticks unsalted butter, softened

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup dried cranberries

6 tablespoons powdered sugar

2 teaspoons grated lemon peel

For the muffins:

Gathering of the Gourmets

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1 cup coarsely chopped pecans

1 cup light brown sugar

½ cup all-purpose flour

¼ teaspoon baking powder

¼ teaspoon salt

2 eggs

½ teaspoon vanilla extract

2 tablespoons butter, melted

Coarsely chop cranberries with sugar and lemon peel. Add butter and blend until mixture is combined but slightly chunky. Cover and chill. Combine next 5 ingredients in a medium bowl and mix well. Add eggs, vanilla, and butter. Stir until all ingredients are combined. Spoon into greased muffin pans, filling half full. Bake at 300 degrees for 20 to 30 minutes. Serve with Cranberry Butter that has been brought to room temperature. Serves 12.

Fillet Mignon with Portabello Mushroom Sauce

6 (6-ounce) beef tenderloin fillets

Gathering of the Gourmets

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½ teaspoon freshly ground pepper

5 tablespoons butter, divided

8 ounces fresh baby portabello or white mushrooms, sliced

1/3 cup dry red wine

½ cup sour cream

¾ cup (3 ounces) Roquefort or blue cheese, crumbled and divided

2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

Rub fillets with pepper. Melt 2 tablespoons butter in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Cook fillets 4 to 5 minutes on each side or to desired degree of doneness. Remove from skillet, and keep warm. Melt remaining 3 tablespoons butter in skillet. Add mushrooms, and saute 3 to 4 minutes or until tender. Add wine and cook 1 to 2 minutes, stirring to loosen particles from bottom of skillet. Stir in sour cream. Sprinkle 1/4 cup cheese into sauce, stirring until melted. Arrange fillets on a serving platter, and drizzle with sauce. Sprinkle with remaining cheese and garnish with chopped parsley. Serves 6.

Potatoes Chantilly

8 to 10 medium red skinned new potatoes, skin on

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½ cup hot milk

1 stick butter

½ cup sour cream

Salt

Pepper

Slice potatoes 1/4-inch thick. Cook in boiling water for 15 minutes or until fork-tender. Whip unpeeled cooked potatoes with electric mixer; mix until moderately smooth. Add hot milk, butter, and sour cream. Whip until mixed. Adjust thickness by adding more milk, if desired. Salt and pepper to taste.

Serves 6 to 8.

Haricot Vert with Roasted Garlic Vinaigrette

1 pound fresh small green beans

½ teaspoon salt

4 cloves garlic, unpeeled

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½ cup plus 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard

3 tablespoons red wine vinegar

1 tablespoon honey

Salt

Freshly ground pepper

1 tablespoon butter

2 tablespoons chopped fresh chives

Rinse the green beans and snap off ends if needed. Bring a large saucepan of water to a vigorous boil, then add the beans and the 1/2 teaspoon of salt. Cook until the beans are just tender. Drain immediately, then rinse in very cold water until the beans are cool. Drain again. To make the vinaigrette, place the garlic cloves on a small baking sheet and drizzle them with 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Bake the garlic in a 350 degree oven until the garlic is soft to the touch, about 30 to 40 minutes. Cool to room temperature. Remove the papery peels from the garlic by squeezing them into a small mixing bowl. Mash the garlic with a fork into a coarse puree. Add the mustard, vinegar, honey, and salt and pepper to taste. Whisk well. While whisking constantly, drizzle the 1/2 cup olive oil very slowly. Set the vinaigrette aside at room temperature. To serve, melt the butter in a saute pan over medium-high heat. Add the green beans and saute quickly, just to warm. Remove pan from heat and toss the beans with the vinaigrette and chives. Serve immediately. Serves 6.

Gathering of the Gourmets

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Crepe Brulee

2 cups heavy cream

1/4 cup plus 4 tablespoons sugar

Pinch of salt

3 egg yolks

1 teaspoon vanilla

To ensure a smooth consistency, line the bottom of a baking pan with a damp kitchen towel before adding the ramekins and boiling water. Preheat oven to 300 degrees and have a pot of boiling water ready. In a saucepan over medium heat, combine cream, 1/4 cup sugar, and salt, and cook, stirring occasionally, until steam rises, 4 to 5 minutes. In a bowl, beat egg yolks and vanilla until smooth. Pour hot cream into yolks, a little at a time, stirring constantly, until blended. Strain mixture through a fine mesh sieve set over a bowl and divide mixture among four 6-ounce ramekins. Place ramekins in a baking pan and add boiling water to fill pan halfway up sides of ramekins. Cover loosely with foil and bake until custard is just set, 25 to 30 minutes. Chill for 2 to 3 hours. Sprinkle 1 tablespoon of sugar evenly over each custard. With a kitchen torch, move the flame continuously in small circular motions just above the surface until the sugar is evenly melted, bubbly, and browned.

Serves 4.

Symphony Coffee

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1 ounce coffee flavored liqueur

½ ounce brandy

6 ounces freshly brewed hot coffee

Sugar

Cream

Fill a coffee mug with hot water to warm it. Pour the water out. Pour liqueur and brandy into mug. Add hot coffee. Stir. Add sugar and cream if desired.

Serves 1.

The writer owns Catering by Debbi Covington and is the author of the cookbook, Dining Under the Carolina Moon. Debbi's website address is www.cateringbydebbicovington.com . She may be reached at 525-0350 or by email at debbic@cateringbydebbicovington.com.