



And they're off! More than just a horse race, the Kentucky Derby is a wonderful reason for hosting a gathering. This year the 136th Kentucky Derby will be held on Saturday, May 1. Since the race only lasts for about two minutes, Derby Day food and drink will be needed to make your party a grand success. For this week's menu I've chosen five traditional Kentucky recipes.

Start your party with Benedictine. This spread was made popular at Louisville's Benedict's restaurant and can be used as a dip or a sandwich filling. What's a Derby party without the drink of the day? A Mint Julep is traditionally served in a silver julep cup but is still very tasty served in a glass. The Kentucky Hot Brown is a regional favorite that originated at Louisville's Brown Hotel earlier this century. Many variations can be found, most commonly mushrooms are added and cheddar sauce is substituted. Grits Magnolia is the perfect side dish and for dessert, Derby Pie is a classic. To host an elegant southern affair you should use your finest silver, crystal, china and linens. For a more casual bash, plan a southern barbeque theme using red and white checked tablecloths and fresh flowers. If you decide to join the action this year either theme will capture the flavor of the day. Enjoy!

Benedictine

1 large cucumber

8 ounces cream cheese, softened

2 tablespoons grated onion

1/4 teaspoon salt

1 tablespoon mayonnaise

Dash green food coloring (optional)

Pare, grate and drain cucumber. Combine with remaining ingredients in a food processor. Serve with vegetables or as a tea sandwich spread.

Mint Julep

1/4 cup fresh mint leaves

2 cups water, heated

2 cups sugar

Cracked ice

Kentucky bourbon

To make syrup:

Heat water. Whisk in sugar until dissolved. Remove from heat. Add mint and allow to steep for at least 40 minutes. Remove mint and strain syrup.

For each Mint Julep:

Add cracked ice to julep tumbler or glass. Add 1-1/2 ounces bourbon. Add 2-1/2 teaspoons syrup. Stir lightly. Garnish with fresh mint leaf.

Kentucky Hot Brown

For the sauce:

1/2 stick butter

6 tablespoons all-purpose flour

3 cups warm milk

1/2 cup Parmesan cheese, divided

1 egg, beaten

1 ounce heavy cream, whipped

For the hot browns:

1 tomato, thinly sliced

1 pound roasted turkey, thinly sliced

8 slices bacon, cooked and drained

8 slices bread, toasted

In a large skillet, melt butter over medium heat. Stir in flour. Slowly whisk in the milk and 6 tablespoons of the Parmesan cheese. Stir in egg to thicken the sauce. Season with salt and pepper, to taste. Remove from heat. Fold in whipped cream. For each serving, place two slices of toast onto a heat-proof dish. Cover the toast with tomato slices and turkey. Pour a very liberal amount of sauce over the top. Sprinkle with additional Parmesan cheese. Place under broiler until sauce is bubbly. Remove from broiler and criss-cross two slices of bacon on top. Serve immediately. Serves 4.

Grits Magnolia

3 cups heavy cream

1 stick butter

3 cups water

1 cup quick-cooking grits

Salt

White pepper

Heat cream and water to boil. Add butter, salt and pepper. Slowly add grits and reduce heat. Cook 20 minutes, stirring often. Serves 6.

Derby Pie

1 (9-inch) deep-dish pie shell, unbaked

1/2 cup butter, melted and cooled

2 eggs

1 cup sugar

1/2 cup all-purpose flour

1 cup semisweet chocolate chips

1-1/2 cups chopped pecans

2 tablespoons Kentucky bourbon

Beat eggs with cooled butter. Add flour and sugar. Beat until mixed well. Gently fold in chocolate, pecans and bourbon. Add mixture to pie shell. Bake in preheated 350 degree oven for about 30 minutes, or until set. Serve with fresh whipped cream.

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