

Gingered Beef Wontons
Salmon Mousse
Asparagus Vinaigrette
Bleu Stuffed Mushrooms
Artichoke Heart Bites



Our house has once again become "Party Central!" This time of year, between planning and cooking for customers and preparing for our own annual Christmas soiree, hors d'oeuvres and tapas wind up being dinner almost every night. This week's recipes are some of our favorites! Gingered Beef Wontons are wonderful! They're even good reheated in a 350 degree oven the next day. The wonton wrappers can be found in the produce section of most grocery stores. Salmon Mousse is a recipe that my mother used to make for the Christmas open house parties that she and Daddy hosted when I was a little girl. It's tried and true! Be sure to use red salmon so that your mousse is a pretty color. Asparagus Vinaigrette, Bleu Stuffed Mushrooms and Artichoke Heart Bites are simple-to-make hors d'oeuvres that round out the menu. Enjoy these yummy holiday appetizers with a hearty red wine in front of an open fire. Merry Christmas!

Gingered Beef Wontons

1 envelope dry vegetable soup mix
1 pound lean ground beef
1 cup bean sprouts (fresh or canned)
1 (10-ounce) box frozen chopped spinach, thawed and squeezed dry
1 tablespoon white wine
1/2 teaspoon fresh ginger, minced
1 package wonton wrappers
Vegetable oil for frying

In medium bowl, combine soup mix, beef, bean sprouts, spinach, wine, and ginger. Place one teaspoon of mixture on center of each wonton, wrap, and seal. In deep-fat fryer, heat oil to 375 degrees. Drop wontons in hot oil and fry until golden brown. Drain on paper towels. Serve warm with bottled sweet and sour sauce. Serves 10 to 12.

Salmon Mousse

1 envelope unflavored gelatin
1/4 cup water
1 (10-3/4 ounce) can condensed tomato soup, undiluted
1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese
1 cup mayonnaise
1 (7-ounce) can red salmon, drained and flaked
1/2 cup finely chopped onion
1/2 cup finely chopped celery

Soften the gelatin in the water. Dissolve over hot water stirring constantly. Over low heat, beat together the soup and cream cheese until smooth and hot. Off heat, stir in the gelatin, cool. Thoroughly stir in the remaining ingredients. Turn into a 4 to 5 cup mold that has been sprayed with vegetable spray. Chill until firm. Unmold and serve with assorted crackers. Serves 10 to 12.

Asparagus Vinaigrette

3 pounds fresh asparagus
1 sweet red pepper, seeded and cut into strips
1/2 cup vegetable oil, divided
1/4 cup white wine vinegar
2 tablespoons water
1 tablespoon grated onion
1 teaspoon dry mustard
1/2 teaspoon salt
Pinch of pepper

Snap off tough ends of asparagus. Arrange asparagus in steamer basket over boiling water. Cover and steam 8 minutes or until crisp-tender. Plunge asparagus unto ice water; drain. Sauté red pepper strips in 1 tablespoon hot oil in a skillet over medium-high heat until crisp-tender. Plunge pepper strips into ice water to stop the cooking process; drain. Place asparagus spears and pepper strips in a large shallow dish. Combine remaining oil, wine, vinegar, and remaining 5 ingredients, pour over vegetables. Cover and chill at least 8 hours. Serve with a slotted spoon. Serves 10 to 12.

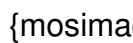
Bleu Stuffed Mushrooms

4 ounces Bleu cheese
4 ounces cream cheese
1 tablespoon heavy cream
8 ounces whole mushrooms, stems removed
Small pecan halves

In a medium bowl, combine the Bleu cheese and the cream cheese. Beat them together with an electric mixer so that they are smooth. Add the cream and beat it in so that the mixture is fluffy. Fill the mushroom caps with the cheese mixture. Top each with a pecan half. Bake in a 350 degree oven for 15 minutes. Serve warm. Serves 10 to 12.

Artichoke Heart Bites

2 (6-ounce) jars marinated artichoke hearts
1/3 cup chopped onion
1 clove garlic, chopped
4 eggs
1/4 cup Italian seasoned bread crumbs
2 tablespoons dried parsley flakes
1 (8-ounce) package Swiss cheese, shredded
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon pepper
1/2 teaspoon oregano
1/8 teaspoon hot sauce

 Drain artichoke hearts. Reserve liquid from one jar. Coarsely chop drained artichoke hearts. Sauté onion in reserved liquid. Beat eggs. Combine artichoke hearts, onion, garlic, bread crumbs, parsley, cheese, salt, pepper, oregano, hot sauce, and eggs. Pour into a greased 9x9" baking dish. Bake at 350 degrees for 30 to 35 minutes. Serves 10 to 12.

The writer owns Catering by Debbi Covington and is the author of the cookbook, Dining Under the Carolina Moon. Debbi may be reached at 525-0350.