

Pleasures of Potluck

Written by Debbi Covington
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Potluck dinners are a great way to get together with friends and enjoy some tasty dishes! Whenever the impulse to host a casual party strikes, you can call up your friends, tell them you're organizing a potluck, and ask them to bring along one dish to share with the rest of the group. Although the term "potluck" suggests a random assortment of dishes, it's likely to turn out better if you do a little bit of organizing. If you don't want to risk the chance that everyone will bring only desserts, begin by assigning your guests a specific course to bring along.

Remember to dig out extra serving platters and utensils before your guests arrive. You don't want to be distracted from your soiree because you're busy pulling things out of your cabinets. Don't forget that someone needs to be responsible for beverages. Sometimes the host will stock the bar with alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks including juices, water and soft drinks. Often the host will provide the main course and ask guests to bring side dishes and desserts. It's really up to you based on the size of your guest list. Whether you're hosting the potluck or are simply invited to attend one, here are suggestions for making the event a success: All dishes should be prepared in advance. Nobody should do more in the kitchen than pop something in the oven for reheating. The dishes should be easy to transport. If there more than eight people attending the party, the serving size of each dish does not need to equal the number of guests. Everybody will take only a small portion of each dish when there are many from which to choose. Traditional potluck dishes include casseroles, desserts, salads and breads. Recipes don't need to be fancy. Dishes that have been handed down through the generations are often the most popular. If you're looking for a new recipe to try at your next potluck, here are several excellent suggestions to start you on your way to potluck fame.

Minted Wild Rice Salad

- 1 cup uncooked wild rice, rinsed and drained
- 1½ cups chopped tomatoes
- 1 cup chopped green pepper
- 1 cup chopped green onion
- 2/3 cup dried cherries or golden raisins
- 2/3 cup chopped pecans
- ½ cup snipped fresh mint
- 1/3 cup olive oil

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1/3 cup lemon juice

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper

Cook wild rice according to package directions; drain and cool. In a large bowl, combine cooled rice, tomatoes, green pepper, green onion, cherries or raisins, pecans and mint; set aside. In a small bowl, combine oil, lemon juice, salt and black pepper; mix well. Pour over wild rice mixture, tossing to coat. Cover and chill for 2 to 8 hours. Serves 12.

Broccoli and Orange Salad

2 cups mayonnaise

2/3 cup sugar

4 tablespoons white vinegar

2 (12-ounce) package broccoli florets

2 cups seedless red grapes, halved

2 (11-ounce) cans Mandarin oranges, drained

2 stalks celery, diced

1 cup roasted pistachio kernels

Stir together first 3 ingredients in a small bowl. Cover and chill the dressing for at least 3 hours. Mix broccoli, grapes, oranges, celery, and pistachios. Toss gently with dressing to coat. Serve with a slotted spoon. Serves 12.

Herbed Parmesan Biscuits

2 (16-ounce) can refrigerated buttermilk biscuits

1 1/2 sticks butter, melted

1 teaspoon dill weed

2 teaspoons dried minced onion

2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

4 teaspoons grated Parmesan cheese

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Separate biscuits and divide into quarters. Add dill weed, onion, parsley, and cheese to melted butter; mix well. Roll each biscuit piece in butter mixture to coat well and place on buttered baking sheet. Bake for 8 to 10 minutes until golden. Serves 10.

Baked Shrimp Curry

1/4 cup butter

2 tablespoons all-purpose flour

1 tablespoon curry powder

1/2 teaspoon paprika

1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg

2 cups half-and-half

2 pounds fresh shrimp, peeled and deveined

2 tablespoons dry sherry

2 teaspoons lemon juice

2 teaspoons grated fresh ginger

1/4 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce

4 cups hot cooked rice

Condiments: chutney, finely shredded orange peel, flaked coconut and chopped peanuts

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Melt butter in a saucepan. Stir in flour, curry powder, paprika and nutmeg. Stir in half-and-half. Cook and stir over medium heat until thickened and bubbly. Cook and stir for one minute more. Stir in shrimp, sherry, lemon juice, ginger and Worcestershire sauce; heat through. Transfer to an ungreased 2-quart casserole dish. Bake, covered, in a 350 degree oven for about 20 to 25 minutes or until the mixture is bubbly and shrimp are pink and cooked through. Serve with hot rice. Pass condiments to sprinkle on each serving. Serves 8.

Barbecue Burger Casserole

2 pounds ground sirloin
1 medium sweet onion, chopped
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup barbecue sauce
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup ketchup
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon pepper
1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese, softened
1 (8-ounce) container sour cream
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup chopped green onions
1 (8-ounce) package wide egg noodles, cooked and drained
2 cups shredded Colby-Jack cheese, divided
Chopped dill pickle

Cook ground sirloin and onion in a large skillet over medium heat, stirring until beef crumbles and is no longer pink. Drain and return to skillet. Add barbecue sauce and next 4 ingredients to beef mixture. Simmer until mixture is warmed through, stirring often. Combine cream cheese and sour cream, stirring until smooth. Stir in green onions and hot cooked noodles. Layer half of noodle mixture in a greased 2-quart baking dish. Top with half of beef mixture. Sprinkle with 1 cup cheese. Top with remaining noodle mixture and remaining beef mixture. (If desired, cover and chill overnight. Let stand at room temperature 30 minutes before baking.) Cover and bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes or until thoroughly heated. Uncover and sprinkle with remaining 1 cup cheese. Bake 5 more minutes. Garnish with chopped dill pickle. Serves 8.

Au Gratin Potatoes and Peas

1½ pounds potatoes, peeled and cut into ½-inch cubes
1 cup coarsely crushed butter-flavored crackers
2 tablespoons butter, melted
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup butter
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon dried dill
 $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon salt
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground black pepper
2½ cups milk
1½ cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese
1 (16-ounce) package frozen peas, thawed
1 (4-ounce) jar pimentos, drained

In a large saucepan, combine potatoes and enough water to cover. Bring to boiling. Cook, covered, for 3 minutes. Drain; set aside. Meanwhile, grease a 3-quart rectangular baking dish;

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set aside. In a small bowl, combine crushed crackers and 2 tablespoons melted butter; set aside. For the sauce: in a large saucepan, melt 1/3 cup butter. Stir in flour, dill, salt and pepper. Add milk all at once. Cook and stir over medium heat until thickened and bubbly. Remove from heat. Add cheese, stirring until melted. Combine potatoes, peas and pimentos in prepared baking dish; pour sauce over all. Sprinkle with cracker mixture. Bake, uncovered, in a 350 degree oven about 30 minutes or until potatoes are tender. Serves 10.

Peachy Upside-Down Cake

1 package yellow cake mix

½ cup butter

1 cup packed brown sugar

1 ½ cups sliced, peeled fresh peaches

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Prepare cake batter according to package directions; set batter aside. Divide the butter between two 9x1½ -inch round cake pans. Place pans in the oven about 5 minutes or until butter is melted. Remove pans from oven. Stir half of the brown sugar into the butter in each pan and spread evenly over bottoms of cake pans. Arrange peach slices over brown sugar mixture. Spoon cake batter over fruit, dividing evenly. Bake for 30 to 35 minutes or until a wooden toothpick inserted near center comes out clean. Cool in pan on wire rack for 5 minutes. Loosen sides; invert onto serving plates. Serve warm. Serves 16.

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