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TASTE

Entertaining Made Easy: Recipes to Impress Without the Stress

Make room for good food, great company and less time in the kitchen. We're kicking off the hosting season with simple, delicious recipes and smart entertaining tips for every size of get-together.

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As we roll back into the late fall we can't help but start to realize that the holidays are just around the corner. How many more 'shopping days' left may be an over-used catch phrase but you can't escape that in no time at all your living room (and dining room) will be filled with family and friends eager to catch-up.

Entertaining for any size group can be a challenge and we always like to revert back to the foundation rule of entertaining … don't bite off more than you can chew. The larger the group, the more work… the more work, the more stress… the more stress, the less you will enjoy hosting, so the solution is simple.

Plan your entertaining to match how much time you have to prep and how much work you are comfortable doing. Any level of entertaining where a host puts in effort should be appreciated and sometimes even the simplest recipes can be the most memorable.

This month for Zoomer we highlight some recipes that will wow you guests without overwhelming the host. So pick the date, send out the invites and get ready to reclaim your love of entertaining all over again!

THE COCKTAIL



Chambord Spritz

We love this cocktail since it's a twist on a classic Kir Royale but with a little more theatrics to it. Also it offers the perfect option for guests to opt out of the bitters and sugar to just enjoy a crisp glass of prosecco.

YIELD: makes 1 cocktail | **PREP TIME:** 2 minutes

Ingredients:

4 oz sparkling wine
1 oz chambord liqueur
1 sugar cube or ½ a teaspoon of sugar
3 dashes of bitters
Skewered blackberries grapes, for garnish

Method:

- Add the sugar to the glass
- Top with bitters and use the spoon to mix the sugar and bitters
- Add chambord and sparkling wine
- Finish with garnish

SHEILA SAYS: *Consider setting up a mini cocktail station near your front entrance with a tray of flutes, a small bowl of sugar cubes, a little bottle of bitters, and a bottle of prosecco on ice. Mixing this cocktail takes only a few seconds and provides some entertainment as guests arrive.*

THE APPETIZERS





Bruschetta Bar

Bruschetta is always a fan-favourite and we love adding some variety with a self-serve bruschetta bar. While doing three toppings may seem like a lot of work, it really isn't, and most of the work can be done well in advance with a glass of wine by your side and the pre-game tunes playing!

YIELD: serves 6–8 of each canapé | **PREP TIME:** 30 minutes + 30 minutes–overnight to rest · cook time: 20 minutes

Ingredients:

Crostini:

2 large baguettes

¼ cup olive oil

Tomatoes:

3 medium on-the-vine tomatoes
½ pint cherry tomatoes
2 small garlic cloves
1½ tbsp olive oil
4–6 large basil leaves, torn
1 oregano sprig, leaves only
¼ tsp sea salt
Black pepper

Mushrooms:

3 small garlic cloves
2 tbsp olive oil
1 lb mixed mushrooms
3 thyme sprigs
1 rosemary sprig
½ tsp sea salt
¼ tsp black pepper
1 tbsp balsamic vinegar, optional
2 tbsp chopped flat-leaf parsley

Zucchinis:

2 zucchinis
1½ tbsp olive oil
½ lemon, juice of
1 tbsp chopped basil
1 tsp chopped dill
¼ tsp sea salt
2 Tbsp shaved Parmigiano-Reggiano

Method:

Crostini:

• Preheat the oven to broil. Cut the baguettes into thin slices, about ¼-inch to ⅓-inch thick. You should get between 15 and 20 slices from a large baguette. Place the slices on a baking sheet and brush lightly with the oil.
• Broil, flipping once, until the slices are lightly toasted and golden brown, 5–10 minutes. Remove from the oven and cool. If you're preparing the crostini more than 1–2 hours before the event, store in an airtight container to keep them crispy.

Tomatoes:

• Cut the vine tomatoes into bite-sized pieces and quarter the cherry tomatoes. Crush the garlic with the heel of your hand or the flat edge of a knife so that it is flattened but still intact.
• Place the tomatoes and garlic in a medium bowl and add the remaining tomato ingredients. Set aside for at least 1 hour for the flavors to amalgamate. Remove the garlic before serving.

Mushrooms:

• Slightly crush the garlic with the heel of your hand or the flat edge of a knife so that it is flattened but still intact.
• Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the garlic and fry until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Remove the garlic from the oil, reduce the heat to low, and add the mushrooms, thyme, rosemary, salt, and pepper.
• Cover and cook, stirring occasionally, until the mushrooms are soft, 7–9 minutes.
• Add the balsamic and cook until all the liquid has evaporated, about 1 minute. Stir in the parsley, then remove from the heat and let cool slightly.
• Pour the mushroom mixture onto a cutting board. Chop the mushrooms and garlic into bite-sized pieces.

Zucchinis:

• Using a vegetable peeler, peel the zucchinis to make ribbons, then roughly chop them into shorter lengths (1–2 inches long). Set aside in a medium bowl. In a mason jar, whisk together the oil, lemon juice, basil, dill, and salt to make a vinaigrette.
• Add the parmigiano-reggiano to the zucchini bowl, followed by the vinaigrette, and toss until completely coated. Set aside uncovered at room temperature for at least 30 minutes, or up to overnight in the fridge, covered, for the zucchini to soften and the flavors to amalgamate.
• Serve all the components alongside the toasted baguette slices.

SEB SAYS: *If you're pressed for time consider dropping one of the three toppings since even two options offer variety plus, if your guests didn't know there might be three garnishes they are none-the-wiser*

Ahi Tuna with Jalapenos

This is one of the most deliciously simple recipes in our arsenal and brings together all our favourite flavours and textures. The sweetness of the ponzu gets balanced with the crisp fresh jalapenos and the saltiness of the soy and other increased, all complementing the ahi tuna.

YIELD: 2 portions | **PREP TIME:** 10 minutes

Ingredients:

8 oz ahi tuna (raw or smoked) sliced thin
1 tbsp Hoisin Sauce
2 tbsp Soy Sauce (low sodium if possible)
2 tbsp Ponzu Sauce
1 tsp Sesame Oil
1 tsp Sesame Seeds
1 tsp to 1 tbsp chili crunch sauce (any sauce with chilis and adjust based on strength of chilis)

Method:

• Slice the tuna thinly and stagger on a shallow plate (note: it helps to freeze the tuna to slice it thin or have your fishmonger do it for you)
• Slice the jalapenos lengthwise, remove seeds and stem, chop into thin slices and put aside.
• Combine all the other ingredients in a small bowl and mix well with a fork.
• Add 3/4 of the mixture over the tuna with a spoon and keep the remaining for any guests who want a little extra sauce.
• Sprinkle the chopped jalapenos over the tuna, and serve.

SHEILA SAYS: *If you prefer your tuna less rare instead of slicing thin you can keep the tuna loin whole and sear it off for a couple of minutes per side in a hot pan and a little bit of oil. You really only want to cook the outer edge of the tuna and keep the centre cool to be perfect for this dish. Then add the sauce and jalapenos.*



Bacon-Wrapped Pretzels

YIELD: serves 6–8 | **PREP TIME:** time: 20 minutes + 20–30 minutes to cool · cook time: 25 minutes

Ingredients:

¾ lb thin-cut bacon (about 12 slices)

1 cup packed brown sugar

3 tbsp chili powder

½ tsp sea salt

⅛ tsp cayenne pepper

12 (each about 6 inches long) pretzel rods

1 rosemary sprig, for garnish

Method:

• Remove the bacon from the fridge to come to room temperature. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper, place a wire rack on top, and spray the rack and the parchment paper generously with cooking spray.

• In a large baking tray or shallow bowl, mix together the sugar, chili powder, salt, and cayenne pepper.

• Dredge both sides of 1 slice of bacon in the seasoning, carefully wrap it around the entire length of 1 pretzel, and place it on the wire rack. Repeat with the remaining bacon and pretzels.

• Bake the pretzels until crisp, 20–25 minutes. When they come out of the oven, they'll be limp and soft to the touch. Let them cool completely on the wire rack, 20–30 minutes, until they harden.

• Serve in a galvanized pail or cup with the rosemary for garnish.

SEB SAYS: *Plan out your entertaining in advance. Buy flowers and groceries 2 days in advance, set your table or entertaining area the night before, pre-prep any dishes or partial dishes the morning of, and empty garbages and clear out some coats from the front closet so you're not dealing with the little annoyances when your guests arrive.*



Seb and Sheila Centner

This dynamic duo serve up their best hosting tips, recipes and drink ideas in our monthly Taste column on Zoomer.com. You can also follow them @zoomermagazine and @sebandsheila for more entertaining inspiration.