



## Slow Cooked Pork Chops with Sweet Potatoes and Apples – Serves 4-6

*This simple pork supper can be put together early in the morning and will be ready, filling the kitchen with wonderful aromas, when you get home later, tired and hungry for a good dinner. Just plop some lettuce and tomatoes on the dinner plates and get the green beans started, and you'll have a wonderful meal in short order.*

*1 15-ounce can or jar of applesauce*

*3 medium sweet potatoes, peeled and sliced into ½-inch slices*

*1 teaspoon of salt, divided*

*½ teaspoon of pepper, divided*

*¼ cup of brown sugar*

*6 bone-in pork chops*

*1 tablespoon of balsamic vinegar*

*2 apples, cored and sliced*

*½ teaspoon of cinnamon*



*Coat the insert of a slow cooker with non-stick spray and pour in the applesauce. Top the applesauce with the sweet potatoes. Sprinkle the potatoes with half of the salt and pepper and the brown sugar. Arrange the pork chops on top of the potatoes, drizzle them with the balsamic vinegar, and sprinkle them with the remaining salt and pepper. Spread the apples on top of the pork chops and sprinkle them with cinnamon. Cover the slow cooker and cook the pork chops on low for 6-8 hours or until the pork chops and potatoes are tender.*



## Country Green Beans – Serves 4-6

*This is an old standby recipe. It's best made with fresh green beans, but the frozen ones work fine in December when the fresh aren't available or are too expensive.*

*1 16-ounce bag of frozen green beans*

*¼ cup of chopped onion*

*¼ cup of chopped ham (left over is perfect)*

*1 tablespoons of olive oil*

*1/3 cup of water*

*¼ teaspoon of garlic powder*

*¼ teaspoon of pepper*

*¼ teaspoon of salt*

*Combine all ingredients in a saucepan and cook 9-15 minutes until the vegetables are tender. Don't overcook! The beans should be green, not limp and gray.*





## Chocolate Pound Cake – Serves 12+

*This is an easy chocolate pound cake, elegant in its simplicity. The cake is dense, moist, and has a light chocolate flavor heightened with a bit of coffee and hint of cinnamon. Serve the cake plain or with a scattering of fruit and dollops of light whipped topping, if you like. My husband also suggests eating the cake plain alongside your breakfast oatmeal as a nice morning treat. He notes that the cake includes healthy ingredients—like yogurt and whole-wheat flour—so why not?*

*½ cup of canola oil*

*1 cup of sugar*

*½ cup of dark brown sugar*

*¾ cup of plain, fat-free Greek yogurt*

*3 eggs*

*1 teaspoon of vanilla extract*

*¼ cup of strong brewed coffee (or instant), cooled to room temperature*

*¾ cup of white whole-wheat flour*

*¾ cup of flour*

*½ cup of cocoa*

*1 teaspoon of cinnamon*

*1 teaspoon of baking powder*

*½ teaspoon of baking soda*

*¼ teaspoon of salt*

*Preheat the oven to 350 degrees and coat a large tube pan with nonstick spray, preferably the type with flour in it (or use regular spray and shake a teaspoon or so of flour in the pan, tapping out the excess). Combine the canola oil, sugars, yogurt, eggs, vanilla extract, and coffee and whisk them well. Combine the flours, cocoa, cinnamon,*





*baking powder, baking soda, and salt and add the dry ingredients to the wet mixture, mixing until you have a smoothish batter. Pour the batter into the greased tube pan and bake the cake for about an hour or until a toothpick inserted in the center of the cake comes out clean. Let the cake cool in the pan for 15 minutes. Invert the cake onto one plate, top side down. Place another plate on the bottom of the cake and then carefully flip it again and remove the plate covering the top of the cake. Dust the cake with confectioners' sugar, if you like.*







RAFT

## December 3

*To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.*

*O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me.*

*Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame; let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.*

*Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.*

*Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.*

*Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.*

*Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord!*

*Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.*

*He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.*

*All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.*

*Psalm 25: 1-5*

The Psalms help us to build our faith, sometimes inviting us to sing about it as we move through the Advent days. The Psalm above may not be familiar to you, but follow the words and think about its message to us, to you. The Psalm speaks to our lives, to our needs, to what lies ahead—God's great gift to a world in want.

Perhaps the Psalm contains a phrase or words that have special meaning for you today?





## In the Kitchen, December 3

*Zucchini Caprese Salad*

*Homemade Tomato Soup*

*Green Muffins*

*Mango Frozen Yogurt*

*Let's do a meatless meal that will fill you up and not out. The Zucchini Caprese Salad is full of lovely Advent colors—green zucchini and salad leaves, fresh red tomatoes, and pearly white mozzarella. It pairs well with the homemade tomato soup that will make your family turn up their noses the next time you try to serve the too salty canned stuff. The green muffins are quick and can cook while you're roasting the zucchini for the salad. With whole grains and cheeses, the muffins are hearty as well as healthy. If you have any left, the green muffins also are wonderful for breakfast on the run. You can certainly serve low fat commercial yogurt for dessert, but why not try your own? It's simple, doesn't include lots of artificial ingredients, has lots of nutrients for relatively few calories, and the taste is much better than the grocery store stuff. You don't even need an ice cream freezer. A food processor or blender will do nicely.*





## Zucchini Caprese Salad – Serves 8

*This salad is a bit different from the usual caprese and includes slightly warm, roasted zucchini. It goes wonderfully with Italian food, and, if you have any left, is great for lunches. I use a mister to coat the zucchini before roasting it. The mister uses less oil than pouring from a bottle and does the job of coating the zucchini with just enough oil to lock in moisture and keep it from burning.*

*2 medium zucchini cut into ½-inch round slices*

*¼ teaspoon salt*

*¼ teaspoon pepper*

*¼ teaspoon Italian seasoning*

*2 teaspoons of olive oil*

*1 large tomato chopped*

*2 ounces of fresh mozzarella “pearls” or chopped mozzarella*

*¼ cup of chopped fresh basil and extra leaves for garnishing*

*¼ teaspoon of garlic powder*

*1 tablespoon of olive oil*

*2 tablespoons of red wine vinegar*

*4 cups of salad greens*



*Heat the oven to 400 degrees. Coat a baking sheet with non-stick spray. Place the zucchini on the baking sheet in one layer and toss or brush it with the oil (or use a mister and mist the zucchini with the oil). Sprinkle the squash evenly with salt, pepper, and Italian seasoning. Bake the zucchini for 10 minutes, turn it, and bake it another 5 minutes. Let it cool a little. Combine the tomato, mozzarella, basil, garlic powder, oil, and vinegar and stir them gently. Divide the salad greens among the plates and top each with some of the warm zucchini. Top the zucchini with some of the tomato mixture, and garnish each plate, if you like, with some of the extra whole basil leaves.*





## Homemade Tomato Soup – Serves 12+

*Homemade soup is simple and much better tasting than the nasty stuff that comes in a can. This version also is much better for you. Try it topped with a bit of low-fat sour cream and some croutons. You won't want the canned stuff again, and even tomato soup haters will describe this version as a favorite!*

*1 tablespoon of canola oil  
1 medium onion, chopped  
1 medium red bell pepper, chopped  
1 tablespoon of minced garlic  
2 cups of reduced sodium chicken broth  
1 28-ounce can of crushed tomatoes  
1 28-ounce can of diced tomatoes  
1 tablespoon of dried basil  
¼ teaspoon of pepper  
½ teaspoon of salt  
2 cups of low-fat sour cream  
Low-fat sour cream for serving (optional)  
Garlic croutons (optional)  
Fresh basil (optional)*



*In a large soup pot or Dutch oven, heat the oil over medium-high heat. Add the onion and sauté it about 5 minutes until it softens. Add the bell pepper and cook the vegetables a couple of minutes more. Add the garlic and cook another minute. Add the broth, both cans of tomatoes, the dried basil, pepper, and salt. Bring the mixture to a boil, stir it, and reduce the heat to a simmer. Let the soup cook, partially covered, for about 30 minutes until the vegetables are softened and to blend the flavors. Turn off the heat. Stir in the sour cream. Serve the soup topped with additional sour cream, some croutons, and fresh basil leaves, if you like.*



DRAFT

## Green Muffins – Makes 12

*These savory little muffins are great for dinner in place of the usual garlic bread, and the muffins also are a change from the usual sweet muffins for breakfast. Try the muffins alongside scrambled eggs. Or you could have green muffins and ham for breakfast or dinner.*

*1 cup of flour*

*1 cup of white whole-wheat flour*

*2 teaspoons of baking powder*

*¼ teaspoon baking soda*

*¼ teaspoon of salt*

*2 eggs*

*1 cup of low-fat milk*

*2 tablespoons of prepared pesto*

*2 cups of frozen spinach, thawed and squeezed dry*

*½ cup of shredded mozzarella cheese*

*¼ cup of shredded Parmesan cheese*

*Preheat the oven to 400 degrees and coat 12 muffin cups with nonstick spray or use cupcake liners spritzed with spray. Whisk together the flours, baking powder, and salt. In a large bowl, whisk well together the eggs, milk, and pesto. Stir in the spinach and cheeses. Add the flour mixture to the wet mixture and stir everything until just moistened. Spoon the batter into the muffin cups and bake for 20-25 minutes until golden and a toothpick inserted in the center of a muffin comes out clean.*



## Mango Frozen Yogurt – Serves 6

*This dessert combines two of my favorite foods—mangoes and Greek yogurt. The frozen yogurt is creamy, sweet, tangy, and reasonably guilt-free, because it's made with nutritious ingredients. Of course, if you eat the whole batch, by yourself, it might not be so guilt-free. So share some. It's better that way.*

*1 16-20-ounce package of frozen mango chunks (or use chopped fresh mangoes and freeze them)*

*2 cups of fat-free Greek yogurt*

*¼ cup of honey*

*1 teaspoon of lime juice (optional)*

*1 fresh mango, chopped (optional)*

*2-3 tablespoons of chopped, toasted cashews (optional)*

*Add all the ingredients to the container of a blender or food processor and pulse until well combined. Continue to pulse, scraping down the sides of the container, as necessary, until the mixture is blended and reaches a thick consistency. Serve the frozen yogurt immediately or put it in a covered container and freeze it until it is firm. Let the yogurt thaw in the refrigerator for 20-30 minutes first, so it's easier to scoop, if you're serving it from the hard frozen stage. If you'd like to be fancy, top each serving with some chopped mangoes and a sprinkling of toasted cashew nuts.*





## December 4

*How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith. Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.*

*1 Thessalonians 3: 9-13*

The Christian community, which we often call the church, developed much nearer than our times to the birth of Jesus. The Apostle Paul was acquainted with the northern Greek city we now know as Thessaloniki. He addressed the newly emerging church there as he shared words he hoped would pattern their faith in that time. Among his teachings, he would have related the story of Jesus's birth.





## In the Kitchen, December 4

*Carrots and Broccoli Pieces with Pesto Bean Dip*

*Turkey Herder's Pie*

*Fresh Fruit*

*Chocolate-Hazelnut Stars*

*How about a comfort meal tonight? Start with something easy. Serve some fresh carrots and broccoli pieces with pesto bean dip to ward off the hungries. Then move on to Turkey Herder's Pie, which uses ground turkey to speed the weeknight dinner process. The vegetables for the evening are incorporated into the pie for taste and simplicity. And for dessert? Fresh fruit is a nice follow-on to the turkey pie. Perhaps some sliced bananas? They are inexpensive compared to other fruits in December and would pair wonderfully with some chocolate-hazelnut stars. The stars can bake in about 15 minutes while the turkey pie is cooking. After you eat dinner and dessert, perhaps the turkey herding won't seem quite as daunting as before.*





## Pesto Bean Dip – Serves 12

*Serve this hummus-like dip with fresh vegetables—carrots, broccoli pieces, etc.—or breads. It's good, quick, and nutritious, as well as quite inexpensive. Use any kind of white beans or garbanzo beans/chick peas.*

*1 15-ounce can of white beans, drained and rinsed*

*1 cup of fresh basil plus a few extra leaves to garnish*

*3 tablespoons of olive oil*

*3 tablespoons of lemon juice*

*¼ cup of walnuts (optional, but good)*

*½ teaspoon of garlic powder or more, to taste*

*¼ teaspoon of salt*

*Water*

*Heat the beans in a microwave safe bowl until warm, then combine them with all the other ingredients in a food processor (or blender). Pulse everything together until you have a thick, creamy mixture, adding water, one tablespoon at a time, as needed to thin the mixture to the consistency you like. Serve the dip garnished with basil leaves.*

