

DRAFT In the Kitchen, December 23

Sliced Tomatoes With Basil

Reuben Chicken with Red Potatoes

Roasted Carrots

French Bread

Dark Cherry Fool

Tonight's meal is short on fuss and long on flavor. Slice some tomatoes, place them on some lettuce leaves, and sprinkle them with basil, fresh or dried, for a simple start. You can drizzle the tomatoes with a tiny bit of balsamic vinegar, if you want to be fancy.

Reuben Chicken requires few ingredients and bubbles away in your slow cooker, sending wonderful aromas through your home. The chicken tastes like you spent hours in the kitchen, even if you didn't. Nestle some cleaned red potatoes in the slow cooker alongside the chicken, and they'll soak up the flavors of the dish and make an easy side.

Roasted carrots are ready in about 30 minutes. Sprinkled with rosemary and thyme and drizzled with a bit of honey, they otherwise require little work on your part. If you'd like something a little extra to soak up the chicken juices, you could heat up some French bread alongside the carrots (see page 281 for a recipe for homemade French bread).

The dark cherry fool is a perfect dessert to make ahead and save yourself from any last minute rush. The fool is a sort of swirled parfait, full of sweet dark cherries, tart Greek yogurt, crunchy meringue cookies, and whipped topping. If you want to dress up the fool, sprinkle some chocolate shavings on top. The dessert is beautiful and makes a sweet, simple ending to an excellent meal.





Easy Reuben Chicken – Serves 6

You can't get much easier than this chicken dish, and it's really, really good. The chicken is tender, moist, and seasoned nicely with a combination of sauerkraut, cheese, and thousand island dressing. Caraway seeds add a traditional, mild flavor to the dish. If you'd prefer to use chicken breasts rather than thighs, feel free. They won't be quite as moist, but they'll be good. If the breasts are large, slice them in half, crosswise, before using them, which will help them cook more evenly. I like to use bacon crumbles to add a layer of smoky flavor, but they aren't essential. If you don't want to cook the potatoes with the chicken, be sure to serve the dish with rice, mashed potatoes, or even bread. The chicken produces lots of tasty juices, and you don't want them go to waste.

6-8 boneless, skinless chicken thighs (1 ½-2 pounds)

2 tablespoons of bacon crumbles (optional)

1 can, jar, or package of sauerkraut (24 ounces), rinsed

1/4 teaspoon of poultry seasoning

1 teaspoon of caraway seeds

1 cup of shredded, low-fat Swiss cheese

1 cup of low-fat thousand island salad dressing (commercial or homemade)

12-18 small red potatoes, scrubbed well and halved or quartered to yield 1/2-inch pieces (optional)

2-3 tablespoons of chopped parsley (optional)

1/2 - 1 cup of fresh bread crumbs, preferably whole grain

Coat a slow cooker with non-stick cooking spray and place half of the sauerkraut in the bottom. Arrange the potatoes on top of the sauerkraut. Put the chicken pieces on top of the potatoes and dust the chicken with the poultry seasoning. Sprinkle on the caraway seeds and bacon crumbles (if you're using them). Pour on the thousand island dressing. Sprinkle the cheese on top of the dressing and then sprinkle the bread crumbs

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on top of the cheese. Cover the slow cooker and cook the chicken on high for an hour. Turn the slow cooker to low and cook the chicken for 4-5 hours more, or until very tender. Serve the chicken sprinkled with parsley, if you'd like.





Roasted Carrots – Serves 4

Roasted carrots are a simple, elegant addition to holiday—or other—dinners. The addition of thyme and rosemary gives the sweet, caramelized carrots a hint of freshness. If you'd like to use pre-cut “baby carrots,” feel free. Just make sure that the carrots you use are dry before you toss them with the oil, or the carrots will steam instead of roast.

16 ounces of carrots, trimmed and cut lengthwise

½ teaspoon of dried thyme

1-2 teaspoons of olive oil

1 tablespoon of chopped fresh rosemary

1 tablespoon of honey

¼ teaspoon of salt

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees and coat a baking sheet with non-stick cooking spray. Add the carrots and oil to the baking sheet and toss or stir the carrots to coat them with the oil. Spread the carrots into a single layer on the baking sheet and sprinkle them with the thyme, rosemary and salt. Drizzle the honey over the carrots. Roast the carrots, stirring them after about 15 minutes, for about 30 minutes or until tender and a bit crispy.



DRAFT Dark Cherry Fool – Serves 4

This is a very quick, no-bake dessert, and it looks lovely in clear glass bowls. The fool is cool, creamy, and full of dark, sweet cherries. Make the dessert early in the day or well before dinner and let it sit in the refrigerator to let the meringues soak up the cherry sauce. Kids really love this sweet ending to a meal, but adults will “ooh and ahh,” too.

½ cup of cherry juice

1 tablespoon of sugar

1 tablespoon of cornstarch

¼ teaspoon of cinnamon

½ cup of dark cherries (from a jar is fine) + four extra cherries for garnishing

½ teaspoon of vanilla extract

¼ teaspoon of almond extract

8-12 smallish meringue cookies, crumbled (about the size of a flat golf ball)

½ cup of plain fat-free Greek yogurt

½ cup of light whipped topping + extra for garnishing

Chocolate shavings (optional)

In a small, microwave safe bowl, combine the cherry juice, sugar, cornstarch, and cinnamon and stir the mixture to dissolve the cornstarch and sugar. Heat the mixture in the microwave for 30 seconds, stir it well, and microwave it for another 15 seconds. Stir the mixture again. If the sauce is not clear and thickened, heat the juice mixture again for 15 seconds and stir it. Set the cherry sauce aside to cool to room temperature.

When the cherry sauce has cooled, gently stir in the cherries, vanilla extract, and almond extract. In a large bowl, combine the meringues, the yogurt, and the cherry sauce and





fold them gently together. You want streaks of white and cherry sauce throughout. Add the whipped topping and fold the topping into the mixture gently, again, just making streaks and not fully combining all the ingredients—you want the red and white to show. Put the dessert into a large glass bowl or individual glass dishes and top with additional whipped topping, a cherry, and/or chocolate shavings, if you like.





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December 24

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing a plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9: 2-6

O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples.

Psalms 96: 1-3

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her first born son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you



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will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Luke 2: 1-20

It is not too late to show kindness to a stranger.





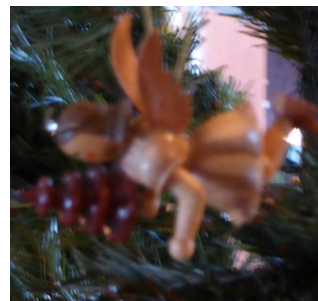
In the Kitchen, December 24

Spinach-Pomegranate Salad

Italian Wedding Soup

Sweet Potato Scones

Amaretti Cake with Raspberry Sherbet



Many of you probably have foods that you “must have” on Christmas Eve. Making Italian wedding soup is a tradition in my house, but it isn’t a family practice. My mom always fixed oyster stew for Christmas Eve. I hated it. The stew featured strange-looking alien things (the oysters) submerged in milk with butter blobs and crumbled saltines on top (apparently to hide the nasty alien things). Yuck. Now, I’m sure many of you like oyster stew, and I know my son would love it, as he does all things with seafood. Nonetheless, I haven’t tried it on him for obvious reasons. Instead, I make Italian wedding soup, which everyone in my household likes. It’s inexpensive, healthy, uncomplicated, and a warm, filling meal in a pot. What more could you want on a busy day of final preparations for Christmas and rushing to get to church on time?

To go with the soup, try a spinach-pomegranate salad. It mirrors some of the flavors in the soup but adds a sweet-tart punch with pomegranate seeds. The toasted pecans add a nice crunch. If you’d like a salty bite to the salad, add the feta. To accompany the soup and salad, how about baking some sweet potato scones? They are quick to mix up and bake in about 20 minutes. Plus, if you have any left, they’re a great pre-breakfast snack for anyone who gets up extra early on Christmas morning!

Dessert is an Amaretti cake accompanied by raspberry sherbet (or sorbet). The cake is a bit of fuss, but only because you’ll need a mixer to whip the egg whites (or you could do it with a balloon whisk and a lot of energy). Otherwise the cake is not hard to make and comes together quickly. You will need to bake the cake for close to 90 minutes, so be



forewarned and do it early in the day or the day before. The cake is fine served plain, at room temperature. The raspberry sherbet is a refreshing, colorful addition. If you don't have the time or inclination to bake the cake, consider simply serving the raspberry sherbet, perhaps with some Christmas cookies (see Part II for some really good cookie recipes).



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Spinach-Pomegranate Salad – Serves 6

This is a good salad to serve when lettuce is expensive or of poor quality. The crisp spinach goes well with the sweet-tart taste of the pomegranate arils, and the dressing is super simple. The salad can be prepared in advance with the dressing left in the bottom of the bowl and the rest of the ingredients put on top, unmixed. Refrigerate the salad until serving time and then toss it just before serving.

6 cups of fresh baby spinach, washed and picked over

½ cup of pomegranate arils (seeds)

½ cup of shredded carrot

½ medium red onion, chopped

¼ cup of chopped, toasted pecans

¼ cup of pomegranate juice

2 tablespoons of cider vinegar

2 tablespoons of olive oil

¼ teaspoon of salt

¼ teaspoon of pepper

¼ cup of feta cheese crumbles (optional but very good)

In a large bowl, whisk the pomegranate juice, vinegar, oil, salt, and pepper. Add the spinach, carrot, onion, pomegranate arils, and pecans, and, if you like, the feta, and toss to mix and coat all the ingredients with the dressing.





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Italian Wedding Soup – Serves 8+

This soup is warm and wonderful. It is loaded with nutritious ingredients, including spinach, carrots, tasty little meatballs, and orzo pasta. The soup is quick to cook, too! It's special and a great meal in a pot for busy nights. If you reheat the soup, you probably will need to add a little more broth or water, because the orzo will absorb some of the soup liquid as it stands.

16-20 ounces of lean ground beef (93 percent)

2 eggs

¼ cup of dried Italian breadcrumbs

2 tablespoons of grated Parmesan cheese (the kind from the round green container is fine)

1 teaspoon of dried basil

2 tablespoons of dried minced onion

12 cups of reduced sodium chicken broth (96 ounces)

1 cup of shredded carrots (or chopped is fine, too)

1 16-ounce bag of frozen spinach

1 cup of uncooked orzo (whole-wheat, preferably)

Shredded Parmesan to serve (optional)

Combine the beef, eggs, breadcrumbs, basil, onion, and cheese and mix them well. Set the mixture aside for 10-15 minutes. In a large soup pot or Dutch oven, bring the broth to a boil. Stir in the pasta and the carrots. Stir the meatball mixture and then form small meatballs (3/4 inch or marble-sized) and drop them in the bubbling broth (you may need to turn the heat down a little, so you don't splash and burn yourself). Stir the soup mixture gently and then return the pot to a boil. Add the spinach and again bring the pot to a boil. Turn down the heat to a simmer and cook the soup until the pasta is tender and the meatballs are done, stirring frequently to prevent the orzo from sticking to the bottom of the pot. Ladle the soup into bowls and sprinkle each serving with a bit of shredded Parmesan cheese if you'd like.