

DRAFT



Turkey Pastitsio – Serves 8+

This is a streamlined version of pastitsio that uses low-fat ground turkey in the sauce rather than the traditional ground beef or lamb. It's a satisfying meal in a dish, and you won't notice the low-fat ingredients. The aroma of the baking casserole—full of spices, tomatoes, garlic, and baking cheeses—will scent your kitchen with incredible smells. If you don't have the ziti or penne pasta, don't worry. Use any medium-smallish pasta you have on hand—elbow macaroni or shells, for example. Also, don't let the long list of ingredients deter you. The dish comes together quickly.

16-24 ounces of ground turkey (93 percent lean)

1 teaspoon of olive or canola oil

1 onion, chopped

1 teaspoon of dried oregano

½ teaspoon of dried thyme

1½ teaspoons of cinnamon

¼ teaspoon of allspice

1 teaspoon of dried parsley flakes

1 teaspoon of garlic powder

1 teaspoon of salt

¼ teaspoon of pepper

1 28-ounce can of crushed tomatoes

½ cup of red wine or water

8-12 ounces of ziti or penne pasta

15 ounces of part-skim ricotta cheese

2 eggs

½ cup of fat-free yogurt

½ teaspoon of nutmeg

½ cup grated Parmesan cheese

½ cup of shredded Parmesan cheese



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In a large skillet over medium high heat, sauté the ground turkey and onion in the olive oil until the turkey is brown and the onion is softened—10-15 minutes. Add the oregano, thyme, cinnamon, allspice, garlic powder, and dried parsley and stir to combine everything. Add the tomatoes, salt, pepper, and wine or water and let the mixture simmer for 20-30 minutes. While the sauce simmers, cook the pasta as directed on the package but until just barely soft, and then drain it. Also preheat the oven to 350 degrees and coat a large casserole or 9 x 13-inch baking dish with nonstick cooking spray. In a large bowl or the food processor, blend the ricotta cheese, eggs, yogurt, nutmeg, and the grated Parmesan cheese until smooth. Put the cooked pasta in the baking dish and pour the meat sauce over it. Spread the ricotta mixture on top of the meat sauce and sprinkle the shredded Parmesan cheese on top of the ricotta mixture. Bake the casserole for 45-60 minutes or until the top is golden brown and bubbly. Let the pastitsio cool for 10-15 minutes before serving it.





Whole-Wheat Walnut Bread – Makes 1 Loaf

This whole-wheat bread is simple to mix up, flush with warm spices, and mildly sweet from a little sugar and molasses. It lacks oil, butter, and eggs, and is fairly economical, even though it tastes quite rich. I sometimes add ½ cup of dried cranberries or other dried fruit and sprinkle the top of the loaf with oats before baking it. The bread goes nicely with dinner or breakfast. A slice, smeared with peanut butter or topped with a slice of cheese, also makes a substantial snack with tea, coffee, or a glass of milk.

2 cups of white whole-wheat flour

1 cup of flour

1 teaspoon of cinnamon

½ teaspoon of nutmeg

½ teaspoon of allspice

¼ teaspoon of cloves

1 cup of chopped walnuts

½ cup of sugar

½ teaspoon of salt

1 teaspoon of baking powder

1 teaspoon of baking soda

1½ cups of low-fat milk

½ cup of molasses

Preheat the oven to 325 degrees and coat a 9 x 5-inch loaf pan with nonstick cooking spray. In a large bowl, whisk the flours, spices, walnuts, sugar, salt, and baking powder together. In another bowl, combine the baking soda, milk, and molasses. Stir the milk mixture into the dry ingredients just until moistened. Add the cranberries, if you'd like. Pour the batter into the prepared pan, sprinkle the oats on top, and bake the bread for about 60 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center of the loaf comes out clean. Let the bread cool in the pan for about 10 minutes before trying to remove it.



Lemon Bars – Makes 18+

This easy recipe is for my Dad, who really enjoys these bars at Christmastime (or whenever he can get them). The bars are light, dusted with confectioner's sugar "snow," and have an intense lemon flavor to them. Don't skip adding the lemon zest. It really gives the bars extra zing. The bars do have a fair amount of sugar in them, so cut them into smallish squares. Savor one or two with a cup of hot coffee or tea or perhaps as a fancy treat alongside fresh fruit.

Base

1 cup of flour

1/3 cup of Smart or Earth Balance (or butter)

¼ cup of confectioner's sugar

Topping

2 eggs

1 cup of sugar

2 tablespoons of flour

½ teaspoon of baking powder

2 tablespoons of lemon juice

Zest of a lemon

Confectioners' sugar



Preheat the oven to 350 degrees and coat an 8 or 9-inch square pan with nonstick cooking spray or line the pan with aluminum foil and coat the foil with nonstick cooking spray. For the base, in a bowl, combine the flour, Smart Balance, and confectioner's sugar until crumbly. Pat the mixture into the pan evenly and bake it for about 15 minutes or until it's set and just starting to brown. While the base is baking, in the same



bowl you used for the base, whisk the eggs. Whisk in the sugar. Add the flour, baking powder, lemon juice, and lemon zest and whisk until frothy. Pour the mixture over the baked base and bake it for about 25 minutes or until the top is just starting to brown. Let the bars cool in the pan and dust them with confectioner's sugar before cutting them.





Nut Crescents – Makes 36

This is a very old, simple recipe. Your grandmother may have made something similar, though she probably used butter (or lard) rather than Smart Balance. Either way, the little crescents are crispy and sweet. The finely chopped nuts and cinnamon sugar combine to make a filling that is special for the season and not too sticky. Try the crescents with different types of nuts and see which kind you like best. Pecans are traditional in my home and many parts of the American South. Nonetheless, the crescents are especially good with hazelnuts, walnuts, or almost any other type of nut. I find that the cookies are easier to roll out if you first refrigerate the dough, but it's not strictly necessary.

2½ cups of flour

1 teaspoon of baking powder

1 cup of Smart or Earth Balance (or butter)

½ cup of low-fat milk

1 egg, beaten

1 cup of sugar

4 teaspoons of cinnamon

1 cup of finely chopped nuts (walnuts, pecans, almonds, hazelnuts, etc.)

Confectioners' sugar (optional)

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees and line cookie sheets with parchment paper or coat them with nonstick cooking spray. In a large bowl, combine the flour, baking powder, and Smart Balance until crumbly. Stir in the egg and milk. Divide the dough into three portions, shaping each into a ball. Combine the sugar, cinnamon, and nuts and sprinkle 1/3 of the mixture on a sheet of waxed paper. Roll one ball at a time into a 12-inch circle on top of the sugar-dusted waxed paper. Cut the circle into 12 wedges and roll each wedge up, starting from a wide edge. Place the cookies point-side down on the prepared cookies sheets and curve them a little into crescents. Repeat the process with



the remaining dough balls. Bake the crescents for 15-20 minutes or until just lightly browned (don't bake them too long). Let the crescents cool a few minutes and then remove them from the pan to continue cooling. Dust the crescents with confectioners' sugar if you like, or serve them "as is."





December 21

...And the angel came to her and said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

Luke 1:30-33

"The Annunciation" is a ponderous and stately term to announce God's entrance into the world in a very special way. The Advent days are passing so quickly now. Is all of the planning enough? The deadlines are approaching. Do you have all of the necessary items from the market? The need for preparation! And the time! Oh, the time! Mary and Joseph most likely are on that tedious, tiresome road from Nazareth down through Galilee to the village of Bethlehem. The time has come, and the taxes, then as now, must be paid.





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In the Kitchen, December 21

Lettuce and Sliced Tomatoes

Cabbage Ball Stew

Irish Brown Bread

Pear Cobbler

Avoid a frantic dinner tonight and serve something simple, nourishing, and homey.

Cabbage ball stew tastes like stuffed cabbage but is much simpler and uses easily available ingredients. Alongside the soup serve some lettuce topped with sliced tomatoes and drizzled with the dressing of your choice. If you'd like to serve bread with the stew, try Irish brown bread. It's a not-to-sweet quick bread that has a crunchy crust and is studded with golden raisins. For dessert, a pear cobbler is uncomplicated; you don't even have to peel the pears, if you don't want. The cobbler can bake while you eat your stew. Pears, cinnamon, and ginger combine to provide comfort in a dish! Serve the cobbler warm, plain, or with low fat frozen yogurt or ice cream melting alongside.





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Cabbage-Ball Stew – 8+

This has all the homey goodness of stuffed cabbage in soup form. It's hot, satisfying, and nutritious. If you use the coleslaw mixture, you'll save time, but you can easily shred your own cabbage by hand or in the food processor to save money.

1 large onion, chopped

1 16-ounce bag of shredded coleslaw mix (or 16 ounces of shredded cabbage)

1 28-ounce can of diced tomatoes

1 cup of water

1 8-ounce can of tomato sauce

¼ cup of cider vinegar

1/3 cup of raisins

1 cup of cooked rice (preferably brown)

1 teaspoon of Worcestershire sauce

¼ teaspoon of pepper

¼ teaspoon of salt

¼ teaspoon of garlic powder

1 tablespoon of dried minced onion

1 teaspoon of dried parsley

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



Combine the onion, coleslaw mix, tomatoes, water, tomato sauce, vinegar, and raisins in a large soup pot. Bring the mixture to a boil, reduce the heat, and simmer the ingredients for 15 minutes. While the cabbage mixture is cooking, combine the remaining ingredients and mix them well. Form small, marble-sized meatballs and drop them into the simmering cabbage mixture. Return the stew to a boil, reduce the heat, and simmer the stew for another 45 minutes or until the meatballs are done, the cabbage is tender, and the sauce is thickened.



DRAFT Irish Brown Bread – Makes 1 Loaf

This quick and easy brown soda bread is barely sweet—mostly from the raisins—and has a nice crunchy top. The bread gets extra flavor from the orange zest and moistness from the combination of oatmeal and yogurt. The bread is quite good with dinner—especially stews—or with breakfast.

*½ cup of golden raisins
2 tablespoons of orange juice
1 cup of flour
2 cups of white whole-wheat flour
2 tablespoons of sugar
1 teaspoon of baking powder
1 teaspoon of baking soda
½ teaspoon of salt
¼ cup of quick cooking oatmeal
1½ tablespoons of butter or canola oil
1½ cups of plain nonfat yogurt
1 teaspoon of orange zest*



Combine the raisins and orange juice and heat them for 30-45 seconds in the microwave until they are very hot. Set them aside to cool. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees and coat a baking sheet with nonstick cooking spray. In a large bowl, combine the flours, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, salt, and oatmeal. Cut the butter or oil into the dry ingredients with a fork. Add the yogurt, orange zest, and raisins with their juice. Stir the mixture just until it holds together and then pat it into a ball. Place the ball on the prepared baking sheet. Cut an X into the top of the dough (about ¼ - ½ inch deep and 2-3 inches long). Bake the bread for about 45 minutes until it's nicely browned.

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Pear Cobbler – Serves 6-8

This is a simple, quick dessert that can bake alongside a main dish or while you eat dinner. A golden crust bakes up over the creamy pears, which are gently spiced with cinnamon and ginger. You can add the crystallized ginger if you'd like extra zing. You can use canned pears (from a large can, drain them and save the juice for something else) if you don't have fresh ones. Alternatively, the recipe works well with other fruit (such as apples). Just remember that if you use frozen fruit, you may need to lengthen the cooking time. I like the cobbler with mango chunks, which I buy frozen and thaw before using them in the cobbler. Make sure you serve the cobbler warm, preferably with a little low-fat frozen yogurt or ice cream.

½ cup Smart or Earth Balance (or butter)

1 cup of flour

1¼ cups of sugar (divided)

1 teaspoon of baking powder

½ cup of milk

3-4 medium pears, cored, sliced, and, if you like, peeled (I don't bother, but the cobbler is better if you do) (see the note at the end of the recipe)

1 teaspoon of cinnamon

¼ teaspoon of ginger

2 tablespoons of chopped crystallized ginger (optional)



Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Melt the Smart or Earth Balance in an 8 x 11-inch (2 quart) baking dish. In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, 1 cup of the sugar, and the baking powder. Mix in the milk and spoon the mixture over the melted Smart or Earth Balance in the dish. Mix the pears with the remaining ¼ cup of sugar, cinnamon, ginger, and, if you're using it, the crystallized ginger and distribute the pear mixture evenly over the batter. Bake the cobbler for about 30 minutes or until the crust is golden brown. Let the cobbler cool for 10 minutes and serve it warm.

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How to Not



What? What does “how to not” mean?

It means how to slow down, not do anything busy, take time to think, ponder, feel the joy of the season rather than the frantic rush of all that you think must be done.

Consider what you really need to do. How critical is it? Is it something that you expect of yourself or that others require you to do? Is it something mass media or mass marketing thinks you should do? Will it really matter if you don’t get everything done? Will Christmas still come? Remember, again, the words of the hymn:

Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free,
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.

Perhaps you might want to consider stepping back from some of your preparations this year and taking time to read the scripture in Luke’s gospel, to take a walk with a friend or family member, to sit quietly for a few minutes with a book and perhaps a cup of coffee or cocoa. To not. It’s okay.