



Tiramisu – Serves 8+

This is one of my family's favorite desserts when we go out to Italian restaurants. Unfortunately, the versions the restaurants serve are loaded with fat and calories—real artery and “butt” busters. At home, I prefer a “lightened” version. It's certainly good, even though it doesn't have all the bad things in the restaurant desserts. Ladyfingers are traditionally used to soak up the coffee and liqueur, but I've found that vanilla wafers work quite well, too. Plus, you'll probably have left over cookies for crumb crusts (or just eating with peanut butter).

½ cup of low-fat sour cream

1 package (8 ounces) of low-fat cream cheese

½ cup of low fat milk

1 teaspoon of vanilla extract

½ cup of strong brewed coffee

2 tablespoons of coffee liqueur (such as Kahlua)

½ teaspoon of cinnamon

1 3-ounce package of ladyfingers, split, or 1-2 cups of vanilla wafers

1 tablespoon of cocoa powder

3 tablespoons of mini chocolate chips

In a large bowl, combine the sour cream, cream cheese, sugar, milk, and vanilla extract and beat the ingredients until you have a smooth mixture. Combine the coffee, liqueur, and cinnamon in a cup. Layer half of the ladyfingers, cut side up (or use the vanilla wafers, turning them bottom side up) in an 8 or 9-inch glass baking dish. Dribble half of the coffee mixture on top of the ladyfingers. Spread half of the cream cheese mixture on top. Repeat the layers—ladyfingers, coffee mixture, and cream cheese mixture. Sprinkle the top of the last cream cheese layer with cocoa powder and chocolate chips. Refrigerate the tiramisu for at least 4 hours. To serve the tiramisu, cut it, cold, into squares, or just spoon it into dessert bowls. Refrigerate any leftovers.



Minty Brownies – Makes 16+

These minty brownies are a special holiday dessert and make wonderful gifts. You may have to make a double batch if you plan to give the brownies away. After tasting them, you'll want some for yourself. The brownies are dense and studded with mint chocolate chips. What if you don't like mint in your brownies or want something different? No problem. Leave out the mint extract and substitute peanut butter chips for the mint chocolate chips. Or make two batches—one with mint and another peanut butter. Yes!

½ cup of canola oil

½ cup of cocoa powder

1 cup of sugar

2 eggs

1 teaspoon of vanilla extract

1 teaspoon of mint extract

½ cup of flour

¼ teaspoon of salt

½ cup of mint chocolate chips

2-3 tablespoons of crushed mint candy (or candy canes) (optional)



Preheat the oven to 350 degrees and coat a 9-inch-square baking pan with nonstick cooking spray or line the 9-inch pan with aluminum foil and coat the foil with nonstick cooking spray. In a large bowl, whisk together the canola oil and cocoa powder. Whisk in the sugar. Add the eggs, one-at-a-time, whisking well after adding each one. Whisk in the extracts. Stir in the flour and salt. Stir in the mint chocolate chips. Spread the batter in the prepared pan. Sprinkle the top of the batter with the crushed mint candy, if you'd like. Bake the brownies for 20-25 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out with moist crumbs but no batter clinging to it. Don't over bake the brownies—they should be fudgy. Let the brownies cool in the pan for 10-15 minutes before trying to cut them.

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Cooking Matters

Joy of Cooking, one of the most published cookbooks in America, at its inception was a project in healing and recovery. The author, Irma S. Rombauer, began the cookbook in 1930 as a way to overcome the emotional and financial loss of her husband of 31 years, Edgar Rombauer. Edgar suffered from depression and committed suicide in February 1930, leaving Irma, then 52 and a homemaker in St. Louis, Missouri, with very little in savings. At the urging of her children, Irma compiled her recipes and ideas about cooking and entertaining into a cookbook that she published privately in 1931. Using much of her savings, Irma initially paid about \$3,000 to the printer, A.C. Clayton, to print 3,000 copies of the cookbook. Fortunately for Irma, the cookbook was a success and expanded from a mother-daughter project in Irma's apartment to commercial publishing. More than 18 million copies of *Joy of Cooking* have been sold since 1936, when the Bobbs-Merrill Company began commercial printing of the book. Simon and Schuster now owns the copyright, multiple editions are in print, and the book has become a resource for cooking that has helped feed millions of people. Julia Child once praised *Joy* as “a fundamental resource for any American cook.” The New York Public Library selected *Joy* as one of the 150 most important and influential books of the 20th Century. *Joy* indeed!





December 13

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Calaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness;

‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

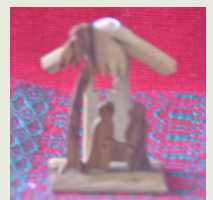
Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

Luke 3: 4-6

Luke is providing an historical context, a stage on which can be seen those figures who will attest to the birth of Jesus. Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, Herod, Calaphas. Luke calls a roll of those leaders who played major parts in the events of their times. The men did so while seeking absolute control. Their domain knew them, feared their power, and trembled for the future of Judea. Ancient histories recorded their deeds and remembered their awesome power.

Luke also wants us to recognize John, the Baptizer, Jesus’s cousin and the son of Zechariah. John is the one who provides an indelible background to God’s great gift. Luke describes John almost royally, despite his rough appearance. John’s usual habitat is south of Jericho, high enough in the hills that the Dead Sea was in sight. In this rather barren setting, the community that included John created and placed the “Dead Sea Scrolls,” which include copies of parts of the Hebrew Bible and important religious and historical texts made before 100 CE.

Luke wants us to know each of the men he listed during our Advent journey!





In the Kitchen, December 13

Lettuce and Tomatoes

Hungarian Soup

Bacon and Swiss Muffins

Fresh Oranges or Clementines

Chocolate Shortbread

Tonight's menu will warm you up fast. For a simple start, arrange some lettuce and tomatoes on a plate and drizzle them with a bit of oil and balsamic vinegar. The Hungarian soup, rich with vegetables, can be made with or without meat and cooks in less than an hour. The sweet paprika gives it an incredible, different taste from the soups you find at the market or casual dining restaurants. The bacon and Swiss muffins are a wonderful, savory accompaniment to the soup and, warm from the oven, will attract lots of foot traffic to your kitchen for samples. For dessert, some fresh oranges or clementines would be a refreshing, healthy way to end the meal. Nonetheless, if you're in the mood for cookies, some homemade chocolate shortbread (drop that package of Oreos!) would make an easy, low fuss, sweet addition.





Hungarian Soup – Serves 8+

This incredibly tasty soup is nutritious! If you'd like more protein in it, add the turkey ham (or leftover ham, if you have it), which also will boost the soup's flavor. If you'd prefer to use less than a pound of the turkey ham (which, yes, is processed meat), just to add extra flavor, feel free to do so. In lieu of the ham or turkey ham, I've also used about a cup of little, finger-sized turkey sausages to good effect. The soup is versatile as well as being economical.

16 ounces of turkey ham, cubed, or mini smoked turkey sausages (optional)

1 16-ounce bag of shredded cabbage or coleslaw mix (or shred your own)

1 large onion, chopped

¼ teaspoon of garlic powder

1-2 tablespoons of sweet Hungarian paprika (or to taste)

2 cups of reduced sodium chicken broth

1 cup of water

1 16-ounce bag of frozen cauliflower

¼ teaspoon of pepper

½ teaspoon of salt

1 cup of plain non-fat yogurt plus extra for serving

Coat the inside of a large soup pot or Dutch oven with non-stick spray and sauté the turkey ham over medium-high heat until it has browned. Add the cabbage, onion, and garlic and sauté the mixture for 5-6 minutes, until the vegetables begin softening. Stir in the paprika. Add the broth, water, and cauliflower and bring the mixture to a boil. Reduce the heat to a simmer, partially cover the pot, and cook the mixture until the cauliflower is very soft—about 30 minutes. Remove the pot from the heat. Mash the mixture carefully with a potato masher to break up the cauliflower and thicken the soup. Add the pepper and salt. Stir in the yogurt. Re-warm the soup over low heat if necessary. Serve the soup in bowls with additional dollops of yogurt on top.



DRAFT Bacon and Swiss Muffins – Makes 12

Bacon and Swiss muffins are best served warm from the oven with their nutty wheat flavor heightened by the salty bacon crumbles. The mild Swiss cheese oozes into the texture of the muffins, softening and enriching it. The chives offer a faint taste, enhancing rather than overwhelming the other flavors of the muffins.

1 cup of white whole-wheat flour

1 cup of flour

2 teaspoons of baking powder

¼ teaspoon of salt

¼ teaspoon of baking soda

1 egg

¼ cup of canola oil

1 cup of low-fat buttermilk

3 tablespoons of bacon crumbles

½ cup of shredded Swiss cheese

1 tablespoon of dried chives



Preheat the oven to 400 degrees and coat 12 muffin cups with nonstick cooking spray or use cupcake liners spritzed with spray. Whisk the flours, baking powder salt, and baking soda together. In a large bowl, whisk the egg, oil, and buttermilk together. Add the flour mixture and stir just to moisten everything. Gently stir in the bacon, Swiss cheese, and chives. Divide the batter among the muffin cups and bake the muffins for about 25 minutes or until they're golden brown.



Chocolate Shortbread – Makes 24-36

Sometimes simple is best, and these chocolate shortbread cookies are a case in point. The cookies don't require many or fancy ingredients, and they are quick to make. The shortbread comes out of the oven crisp and lush with chocolate flavor. The little squares are quite addictive and just the right thing with a cup of tea on a cold night. If you really feel the need to gussy the shortbread up, add 1/2 cup of chopped hazelnuts to the dough before patting it in the pan and then place a hazelnut into the middle of each square or rectangle you score before baking the dough.

4 cups of flour

1/3 cup of cocoa powder

1 cup of Smart or Earth Balance (or butter), softened

1/3 cup of canola oil

1 1/3 cups of confectioners' sugar

1/4 teaspoon of salt

1 teaspoon of vanilla extract

Hazelnuts (optional)



Preheat the oven to 325 degrees. Line a 9 x 13-inch pan with parchment paper or aluminum foil and coat the parchment or foil with nonstick cooking spray. In a large bowl, combine the flour and cocoa powder and set them aside. In another large bowl, beat the Smart Balance/butter, oil, confectioners' sugar, and salt until they are light and fluffy. Mix in the vanilla extract. Gradually add the flour mixture, beating just until the flour is blended into the Smart Balance/butter mixture. Pat the dough into the prepared pan and smooth it into an even layer. Score the dough with a knife into 24-36 rectangles or triangles. Bake the shortbread for 30-35 minutes until the top appears dry. Let the shortbread cool for about 10 minutes and cut it again into bars or triangles. Let the shortbread cool completely before removing it from the pan, using the parchment or aluminum foil, if necessary to lift the pieces out.



December 14

For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Philippians 1: 8-11

Let us go back again to one of the places where the Christian church began—Philippi, in Greece. In his message to the people at Philippi, the apostle Paul has much to say to the new Christians who are a part of this faith community. Paul’s message was of love. Yet, Paul was not always welcome in Philippi and was a prisoner of the Romans on at least one occasion.

Would you (or your family) have been “outsiders” at Philippi? The Advent story has introduced centuries of people—“insiders” and “outsiders”—to the Christian community. Through the church many people have recognized God’s grace through God’s Son. Is there someone in your community of friends, co-workers, or neighbors who might need to hear or hear again the Advent story?





In the Kitchen, December 14

Quick Black Bean Soup

Southwestern Casserole

Zucchini

Corn Muffins

Mexican Wedding Cake

Let's look southward for today's menu and celebrate the many Latin cultures that are gifts to our country. The meal is great to share and easy to prepare ahead of time. The black bean soup is ready in about 20 minutes, and it's loaded with flavor and healthy ingredients. The taste actually improves if you make it ahead and re-warm it later. Southwestern Casserole is easy and a great recipe to feed a crowd. It requires some assembly time and needs about an hour to bake and cool. Nonetheless, the casserole is great for entertaining because you can assemble and refrigerate it until you're ready to bake it. Take the casserole out of the refrigerator and let it sit at room temperature to break the chill while you fix the zucchini and mix up the corn muffins. Pop the casserole in the oven first (it needs to cook the longest), then the zucchini and corn muffins. For a special dessert, try Mexican Wedding Cake. It's best made ahead and refrigerated, but the cake is super easy—just mix and bake. The cream cheese frosting makes it seem decadent, but the cake has been “lightened” considerably. No one will complain!



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Quick Black Bean Soup – Serves 4+

This soup is nutritious, full of fiber, and quite tasty, particularly topped with tomatoes and cilantro. You needn't squash the beans with the potato masher, if you don't want, but I find it's an easy way to thicken the soup without having to resort to pouring part in a blender or using an immersion blender which carries with it a risk of serious injury (i.e., don't use one, despite what the TV cooks say. Listen to the medical community, which advises people to avoid immersion blenders). The potato masher also is easier to wash and lets you control the texture of the mixture. I like my soup thick but still "beany."

- 1 teaspoon of olive oil*
- 1 onion, chopped*
- ¼ cup of chopped red bell pepper*
- 2 teaspoons of minced garlic*
- 2 16-ounce cans of black beans, rinsed and drained*
- 5 cups of reduced sodium chicken broth*
- 1½ teaspoons of cumin*
- 1 teaspoon of chili powder*
- 1 4-ounce can of chopped green chiles*
- ½ teaspoon of pepper (or to taste)*
- 2 teaspoons of lime juice*
- 2 medium tomatoes, chopped*
- 3 tablespoons of chopped cilantro*
- ¼ cup light sour cream (optional)*
- Jalapeno peppers, sliced (optional)*

In a large soup pot, heat the olive oil and add the onion. Sauté the onion for about 5 minutes and then add the red bell pepper and continue sautéing for a few minutes. Add the garlic and cook the vegetables about a minute more. Add in the beans, the chicken broth, the cumin, chili powder, chiles, and pepper. Let the soup cook about 10 minutes to