2. To serve, slowly pour chilled soda water into the pitcher, down the side. Stir gently to blend. Pour through a strainer into chilled martini glasses or ice-filled glasses. Float a mint leaf on top of each. Serve at once.

Per serving: 159 cal., 1% (0.9 cal.) from fat; 0.2 g protein; 0.1 g fat (0 g sat.); 16 g carbo (0.1 g fiber); 1.1 mg sodium; 0 mg chol.

BEST APPETIZER
NANCY HESS, PORTLAND

Northwest Smoked Salmon Crêpes

"A holiday in our house is not complete without these crêpes," says Nancy Hess, who smokes local salmon herself for the filling.

PREP AND COOK TIME: About 2 1/4 hours
MAKES: 3 to 3 1/2 dozen
NOTES: Hot-smoked salmon is firmer and flakier than cold-smoked salmon (lox). You can make the crêpes themselves up to 3 days ahead; cover and chill. Let warm to room temperature before separating. You can fill the crêpes (through step 3) up to 1 day ahead; cover and chill.

- Crêpes (recipe follows)
- 5 ounces hot-smoked salmon (see notes)
- 2/3 cup mayonnaise
- 1/3 cup sour cream
- 1 cup shredded parmesan cheese
- 2 teaspoons lemon juice
- 3/4 teaspoon Worcestershire
- 3/4 teaspoon chopped fresh dill
- 1/8 teaspoon white pepper
- 1/8 teaspoon hot sauce
- Seasoned salt
- 2 tablespoons melted butter
- Paprika
- Fresh dill sprigs, rinsed

1. Stack 2 crêpes and, with a 2 3/4- to 3-inch round cookie cutter, cut into closely spaced rounds. Repeat to cut remaining crêpes; discard scraps.

2. Preheat oven to 350°. Remove skin and bones from salmon. With your hands, break salmon into fine pieces; you should have about 1 cup. In a bowl, mix mayonnaise, sour cream, 1/2 cup parmesan cheese, lemon juice, Worcestershire, chopped dill, white pepper, and hot sauce. Stir in the salmon and seasoned salt to taste.

Northwest Smoked Salmon Crêpes

3. Mound about 1 1/2 teaspoons of the salmon filling on one half of each crêpe round; fold it over to make a half-moon shape. Set crêpes, slightly overlapping, in a buttered 10- by 15-inch baking pan. Drizzle with melted butter and sprinkle with remaining 1/2 cup cheese and a little paprika.

4. Bake until crêpes are golden and bubbly, 15 to 25 minutes. Transfer to a serving platter or plates and garnish with dill sprigs.

Per appetizer: 76 cal., 71% (54 cal.) from fat; 3.3 g protein; 6 g fat (2.2 g sat.); 3.1 g carbo (0.1 g fiber); 112 mg sodium; 26 mg chol.

Crêpes. In a blender, combine 3 **large eggs,** 1 cup **milk,** 1 cup **all-purpose flour,** and 2 tablespoons **melted butter;** whirl until smooth. Set a 10-inch nonstick frying pan over medium to medium-high heat. When hot, coat lightly with melted butter. Immediately pour 1/3 cup crêpe batter into hot pan and tilt to coat bottom. If there are a few holes, drizzle with a little batter to fill in. Cook crêpe until edge is lightly browned and surface looks dry, 30 to 60 seconds. Run a spatula under crêpe edge to loosen. Turn over and brown other side lightly, 10 to 20 seconds. Tip pan over a plate to release crêpe. Repeat to cook remaining batter, stacking cooked crêpes. Makes 7 to 11 crêpes.

First Place

BEST TURKEY

HELENA DARLING, ASHLAND, OR

Dry-Cured Rosemary Turkey

The dry-cure for this turkey was born during a party-advice phone call Helena Darling had with her bachelor brother in Hollywood. It reflects her idea of Thanksgiving dinner—"an earthy feast that acknowledges our farm-to-table roots," she says.

PREP AND COOK TIME: About 3½ hours, plus 3 days to cure

MAKES: About 14 servings (with leftovers)

NOTES: Use a turkey that hasn't been infused with broth or butter.

- 3 tablespoons sea salt or kosher salt
- 3 tablespoons dried marjoram
- 3 tablespoons dried thyme
- 3 tablespoons dried juniper berries
- 1 tablespoon black peppercorns
- 2 teaspoons anise seeds
- 1 turkey (14 to 15 lb.)
- 12 fresh rosemary sprigs (3 in. each)
- 12 cloves garlic, peeled
- ½ cup (¼ lb.) unsalted butter, at room temperature
- Pan gravy (recipe follows)

1. Three days before serving, in a blender or spice grinder, finely grind salt, marjoram, thyme, juniper berries, peppercorns, and anise seeds.

2. Remove and discard leg truss from turkey. Pull off and discard any lumps of fat. Remove giblets and neck; save neck for gravy. Rinse turkey inside and out; pat dry. Cut off wing tips to the first joint and reserve for gravy. Rub half the herb mixture all over turkey; sprinkle remaining in body cavity. Cover and chill for 3 days.

3. Preheat oven to 325° (convection not recommended). Put rosemary sprigs and garlic inside turkey body cavity. Gently push your hand between skin and turkey breast to separate skin from breast. Spread about half the butter over breast under skin. Melt remaining butter and brush lightly over top of turkey. Coat a V-shaped rack with cooking-oil spray and set in a 12- by 17-inch roasting pan. Place turkey, breast down, on the rack. Roast turkey for 1¾ hours.

4. Meanwhile, cook turkey wing tips and neck for pan gravy (recipe follows). Remove turkey from oven and turn breast side up. Return to oven. Roast until a meat thermometer inserted straight down through thickest part of breast to the bone registers 160°, 45 to 60 minutes longer.

5. Tip turkey to drain juices from cavity into pan and transfer to a platter. Let stand in a warm place, uncovered, for 15 to 30 minutes. Finish gravy, then carve turkey.

Per serving: 420 cal., 41% (171 cal.) from fat; 57 g protein; 19 g fat (5.7 g sat.); 1.7 g carbo (0.2 g fiber); sodium (N/A); 167 mg chol.

Pan gravy. Pour 2 tablespoons **vegetable oil** into a 5- to 6-quart pan over medium-high heat. Add turkey wing tips and neck and brown well, 4 to 7 minutes. Add 4½ cups **low-sodium chicken broth** and bring to a boil; cover, reduce heat, and simmer about 1 hour. Remove wings and neck.

While roasted turkey rests, pour pan juices into a 1- to 2-quart glass measure. Skim off and reserve fat. Add turkey wing broth to make 4 cups; if you don't have enough, add **water.** Return ⅓ cup fat (if not enough, add butter) and 1 clove peeled and minced **garlic** to unwashed roasting pan; set over two medium-hot burners. Add ½ cup **all-purpose flour** and stir until bubbly and smooth. Stir in the 4 cups broth and 1 cup **whipping cream;** scrape pan sides and bottom to loosen browned bits. Whisk gravy until smooth and boiling, 4 to 7 minutes. Add **salt** to taste. Makes about 5½ cups.

Per ¼-cup serving: 86 cal., 80% (69 cal.) from fat; 1.3 g protein; 7.7 g fat (3.2 g sat.); 2.8 g carbo (0.1 g fiber); sodium (N/A); 15 mg chol.

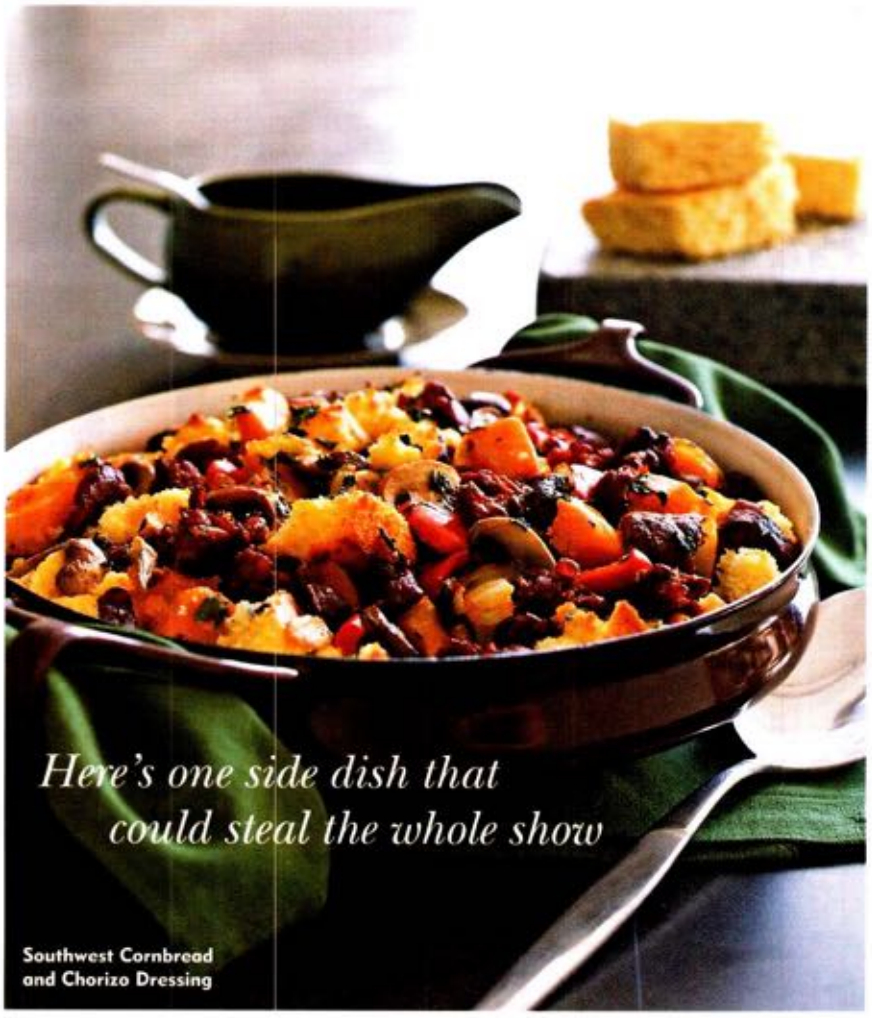
BEST DRESSING
VICTORIA JOHNSON, GILBERT, AZ

Southwest Cornbread and Chorizo Dressing

When Victoria Johnson moved to Arizona, she created a dressing to introduce Southwest flavors to some out-of-state relatives "who didn't even know what chorizo was," she says. "They loved it."

PREP AND COOK TIME: About 2½ hours
MAKES: 10 to 12 servings
NOTES: Choose lean chorizo in natural casings or, if available, in bulk without casings. You can prepare the dressing through step 4 up to 1 day ahead; cover and chill chorizo mixture, and store cornbread airtight at room temperature. Before continuing with step 5, let chorizo mixture stand at room temperature about 30 minutes.

- 1 butternut squash (1¼ to 1½ lb.)
- 2 tablespoons firmly packed dark brown sugar
- 1 onion (6 oz.)
- 1 red bell pepper (8 oz.)
- 1 fresh fennel head (9 oz.)
- 1 pound mushrooms
- 1 pound chorizo sausage (see notes)
- ¼ cup (⅛ lb.) unsalted butter
- ½ cup chopped fresh cilantro
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh sage leaves
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme leaves
- 2 large eggs
- 1 cup fat-skimmed chicken broth
- Cornbread (recipe follows)



Southwest Cornbread and Chorizo Dressing

1. Peel and seed squash. Cut into 1-inch chunks; you should have about 3 cups. In a 3- to 4-quart pan over high heat, combine ½ cup water with brown sugar and the squash. Bring to a boil, cover, reduce heat to medium, and cook, stirring once, until squash is almost tender when pierced, 8 to 10 minutes. Uncover and cook, occasionally stirring gently, until most of the water is evaporated, 3 to 5 minutes longer. Remove from heat and let cool.

2. Peel and chop onion. Rinse, stem, seed, and chop bell pepper. Rinse fennel and trim off and discard base of head and tough stalks. Chop enough fennel to make about 1 cup. Rinse mushrooms and slice ¼ inch thick.

3. Squeeze sausage from casings and break into chunks into a 12-inch frying pan or 5- to 6-quart pan over medium-high heat; stir often until lightly browned and crumbly, 7 to 10 minutes. Pour sausage into a wire strainer to drain; discard fat.

4. Preheat oven to 350°. Add butter to unwashed pan over medium-high heat; when melted, add onion, bell pepper, and fennel and stir often until vegetables begin to soften, 7 to 8 minutes. Add mushrooms and stir until limp, about 3 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in sausage, cilantro, sage, and thyme. Add squash.

5. In a large bowl, whisk together eggs and broth. Break cornbread into ½-inch chunks and drop into bowl. Add sausage mixture and stir gently to combine. Scrape dressing into a buttered 9- by 13-inch baking dish and cover with foil.

6. Bake until hot in the center, 40 to 50 minutes. Uncover and bake until top is crisp and golden brown, 10 to 15 minutes longer.

Per serving: 464 cal., 48% (225 cal.) from fat; 16 g protein; 25 g fat (10 g sat.); 43 g carbo (3.2 g fiber); 853 mg sodium; 117 mg chol.

Cornbread. Preheat oven to 400°. In a bowl, mix 2 boxes (8½ oz. each) **corn muffin mix,** ¾ cup **milk,** and 2 **large eggs** until blended but still slightly lumpy. Pour batter into a buttered 9- by 13-inch baking pan. Bake until top is golden brown, 15 to 20 minutes. Let cornbread cool in pan on a rack.

Second Place

BEST SIDE DISH

KRISTINE SNYDER, KIHEI, HI

Roasted Kabocha Squash Bowl with Autumn Vegetables

When Kristine Snyder saw kabocha squash on sale, she imagined a multicultural twist on the more common soup-in-a-squash bowl: She turned the kabocha into a sort of Moroccan tagine for fall vegetables and added an Asian-flavored sauce. The medley would also make a good vegetarian main course.

PREP AND COOK TIME: About 1 hour

MAKES: About 10 servings

NOTES: If you want to get a head start on this dish, cut and prepare the vegetables and squash up to 1 day ahead; cover and chill. Cook vegetables shortly before serving.

- 1 kabocha squash (4½ to 5 lb.)
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- 2 onions (6 oz. each)
- 1 pound green beans
- ½ red bell pepper (4 oz. total)
- 7 tablespoons butter
- 3 cloves garlic, peeled and minced
- 2 tablespoons mirin (sweet sake or sweet cooking rice wine) or cream sherry
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire
- ¼ teaspoon ground cumin
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne

1. Preheat oven to 375°. Rinse squash and pat dry. Cut around stem to make a 4-inch lid. Remove lid and scrape out and discard seeds. Brush interior of squash and inside of lid with 1 tablespoon olive oil. Sprinkle lightly with salt and pepper. Set lid on squash and place in a 10- by 15-inch baking pan. Bake for 10 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, peel onions and cut lengthwise into ¾-inch-wide wedges. Brush onions with remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil and sprinkle lightly with salt and pepper. Arrange onions around squash and return to oven. Bake until squash and onions are tender when pierced, 25 to 30 minutes for onions and 35 to 40 minutes for squash; remove when done.

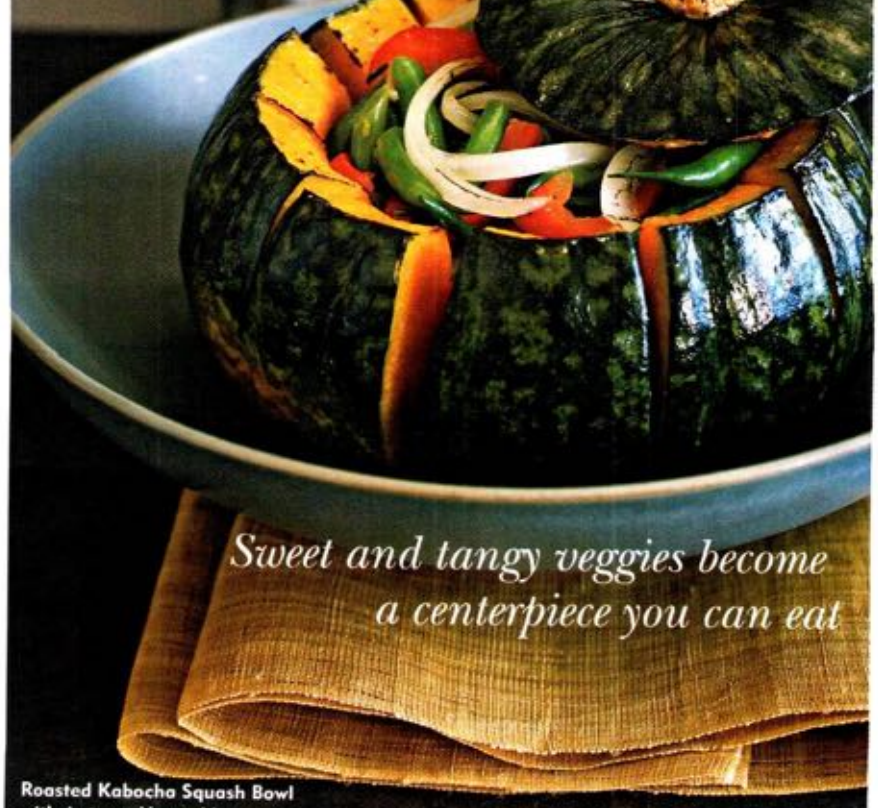
3. Meanwhile, rinse green beans and trim off ends; cut into about 3-inch lengths. Rinse, stem, and seed bell pepper half; cut into ¼-inch-wide strips about 2 inches long.

4. Put butter in a 1- to 2-quart pan over medium-low heat; when it begins to melt, add garlic and stir occasionally until butter is melted, about 1 minute. Whisk in mirin, soy sauce, Worcestershire, cumin, and cayenne. Cook, whisking often, to blend flavors, 1 to 2 minutes. Pour into a bowl or small pitcher.

5. Shortly before serving, in a 4- to 5-quart pan over high heat, bring about 2 quarts water to a boil. Add beans and red pepper; cook just until crisp-tender to bite, 4 to 5 minutes. Drain well and season to taste with salt and pepper.

6. Transfer squash bowl to a serving bowl or platter. Cut it—down to but not through the base—into 10 wedges for a flower-like presentation; for a bowl shape, cut the squash three-quarters of the way to the bottom. Mound green bean–red pepper mixture and roasted onions in the center. Drizzle ¼ cup of the mirin-soy mixture over the vegetables. Reserve the squash lid for another use or for a decorative top for the bowl. Offer remaining sauce to add to taste.

Per serving: 200 cal., 59% (117 cal.) from fat; 3.6 g protein; 13 g fat (5.6 g sat.); 21 g carbo (4 g fiber); 314 mg sodium; 22 mg chol.



Roasted Kabocha Squash Bowl with Autumn Vegetables

FOOD STYLING: SUSAN OTTAVIANO. PROP STYLING: CATHERINE DU

DRESSING RUNNER-UP
LYNN LLOYD, SANTA CRUZ, CA

Basmati Rice Dressing with Dried Fruit, Toasted Almonds, and Coconut

A longtime maker of traditional Indian pilafs, Lynn Lloyd wanted to create a special one a couple of years ago. Her family all stood around the stove with forks, tasting and suggesting. "After I added the cinnamon, everyone said, 'Stop! This is it.'"

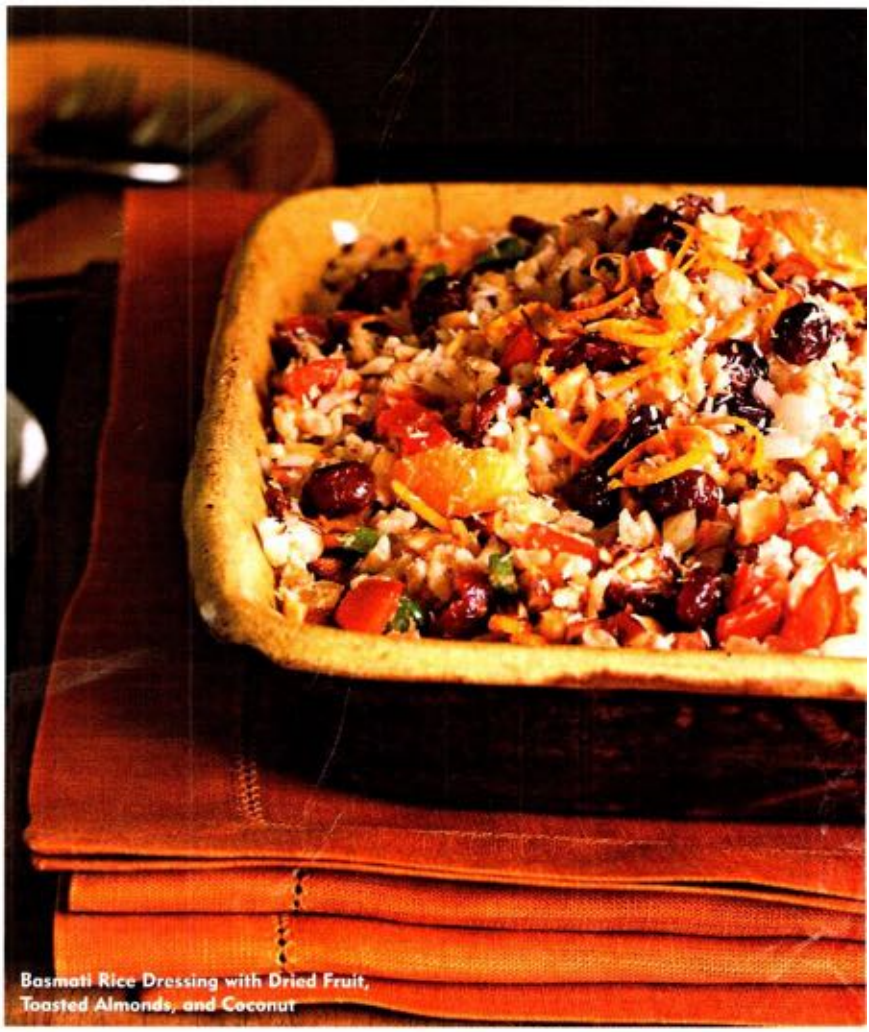
PREP AND COOK TIME: About 1½ hours
MAKES: 10 to 12 servings
NOTES: You can prepare this dressing through step 4 up to 1 day ahead; cover and chill. To reheat, let dressing stand at room temperature for 1 hour, then bake, covered, in a 350° oven until hot, about 1 hour.

- 2 cups brown basmati rice
- 2 cups dried apricots, cut into quarters
- 1 cup dried sweetened cranberries
- 1 cup dried unsweetened flaked coconut
- 2 cups slivered almonds
- ¾ cup (⅜ lb.) butter
- 2 cups chopped onion
- ½ cup chopped red bell pepper
- ½ cup chopped green bell pepper
- 2 teaspoons grated fresh ginger
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 2 teaspoons curry powder
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- 1 teaspoon ground cardamom
- 1 teaspoon grated orange peel
- 1 teaspoon grated lime peel
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon

1. Preheat oven to 350°. In a 2- to 2½-quart pan over high heat, bring 3½ cups water and the rice to a boil. Reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer until water is absorbed and rice is tender to bite, about 45 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, in a bowl, combine dried apricots and cranberries. Cover with boiling water and let stand until fruit is plump, about 15 minutes. Drain.

3. Place coconut and almonds in two separate 10- by 15-inch baking pans.



Basmati Rice Dressing with Dried Fruit, Toasted Almonds, and Coconut

Bake, stirring occasionally, until golden, 4 to 5 minutes for coconut, 8 to 10 minutes for almonds.

4. In a 6- to 8-quart pan over medium-high heat, melt butter. Add onion and red and green bell peppers; stir until onion is limp, about 5 minutes. Reduce heat to medium and add ginger, garlic, curry powder, cumin, salt, pepper, cardamom, orange peel, lime peel, and cinnamon; stir just until spices are aromatic, about 30 seconds. Remove from heat. Stir in cooked rice, dried fruit, almonds, and coconut. Spoon into a shallow 3-quart baking dish and cover with foil.

5. Bake until hot in the center, about 30 minutes.

Per serving: 481 cal., 52% (252 cal.) from fat; 8.9 g protein; 28 g fat (11 g sat.); 54 g carbo (4.2 g fiber); 514 mg sodium; 31 mg chol.

SIDE DISH RUNNER-UP
CAROLE McDONALD, MILWAUKIE, OR

Poached Pear, Macadamia, and Spinach Salad with Goat Cheese

The McDonald family loves wine-poached pears for dessert. With a can of honey-roasted macadamias on hand from a recent trip to Hawaii, plus some tangy goat cheese and spinach, Carole McDonald decided to put the usual dessert in a salad.

PREP AND COOK TIME: About 1¼ hours
MAKES: About 12 servings
NOTES: You can poach the pears up to 3 days ahead; leave in liquid, cover, and chill. The leftover poaching liquid is great in other dishes: Boil it, uncovered, over high heat until reduced by about half, about 25 minutes. Pour

through a wire strainer. Cool, cover, and chill up to 1 month. Add a spoonful to glasses of sparkling wine for an aperitif or spoon over vanilla ice cream and berries for dessert.

Poached pears (recipe follows)
- 6 quarts baby spinach leaves (18 oz.), rinsed and crisped
- 1 jar (6 oz.; 1¼ cups) plain roasted, roasted and salted, or honey-roasted macadamia nuts
- 4 ounces fresh chèvre (goat cheese)
- ⅓ cup mild olive oil
- 3 tablespoons rice vinegar
- 1 tablespoon whole-grain mustard
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 1 tablespoon dried thyme
- Salt and pepper
- ¾ cup pomegranate seeds (optional)

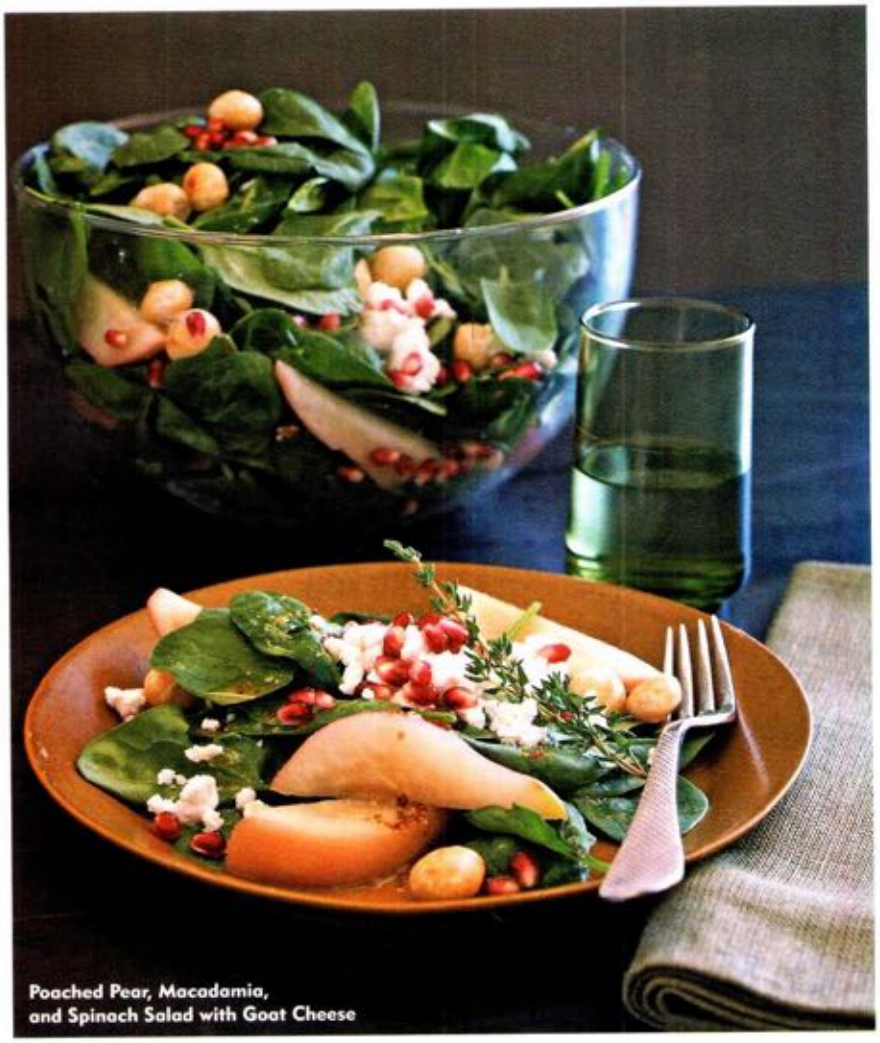
1. With a slotted spoon, lift pears from poaching liquid; reserve liquid. Slice pears lengthwise or cut them into about ½-inch chunks.

2. In a large bowl, combine pears with spinach and macadamia nuts. Coarsely crumble half the cheese over salad.

3. In a small bowl, whisk together olive oil, rice vinegar, 3 tablespoons reserved pear-poaching liquid (save remaining for another use; see notes), mustard, honey, and thyme. Pour over salad and gently mix to coat, adding salt and pepper to taste. Sprinkle with pomegranate seeds and crumble remaining cheese over salad.

Per serving: 249 cal., 69% (171 cal.) from fat; 4.2 g protein; 19 g fat (3.7 g sat.); 20 g carbo (3.8 g fiber); 132 mg sodium; 4.3 mg chol.

Poached pears. In a 5- to 6-quart pan over medium heat, combine 1 bottle (750 ml.) **dry red wine,** ¾ cup **sugar,** 1 thin strip (3 in. by ½ in.) **lemon** peel (yellow part only), 2 **star anise** (or 1 teaspoon anise seeds and 1 cinnamon stick, 3 in.), and 1 **vanilla bean** (6 in.), split lengthwise. Bring to a simmer. Meanwhile, peel 3 firm-ripe **Anjou pears** (1½ lb. total), cut in half lengthwise, and core. Place pears in wine mixture. Cover and simmer, turning occasionally, until pears are barely tender when pierced, about 15 minutes. Remove from heat and let pears cool in liquid, turning occasionally, at least 30 minutes, or cover and chill up to 3 days.



Poached Pear, Macadamia, and Spinach Salad with Goat Cheese

SIDE DISH RUNNER-UP
DOROTHY REINHOLD, MALIBU, CA

Fresh Cranberry-Ginger Relish

"I'm the candied ginger queen," says Dorothy Reinhold. "Many things are improved by ginger. Cranberry sauce can be a one-trick pony—all sweetness and not much else. But if you add something with bite, suddenly you have an adventurous meal on your plate."

PREP TIME: About 10 minutes
MAKES: About 3 cups; 12 servings
NOTES: You can make this relish up to 3 days ahead; cover and chill.

- 1 bag (12 oz.; 3½ cups) fresh cranberries
- 1 lemon (5 oz.), rinsed
- ⅔ cup sugar
- ½ cup crystallized ginger, coarsely chopped
- ¼ teaspoon ground ginger

1. Rinse and drain cranberries. Remove and discard any bruised or soft ones. Gently pat berries dry.

2. With a vegetable peeler, pare all the yellow peel (not the white pith) from lemon in thin strips; coarsely chop. Save lemon for other uses.

3. In a food processor, whirl cranberries, lemon peel, sugar, crystallized ginger, and ground ginger just until finely chopped. Cover and chill at least 4 hours.

Per ¼-cup serving: 93 cal., 1% (0.9 cal.) from fat; 0.1 g protein; 0.1 g fat (0 g sat.); 24 g carbo (1.4 g fiber); 8.6 mg sodium; 0 mg chol.

FOOD STYLING: SUSAN OTTAVIANO; PROP STYLING: CATHERINE DILL

on low speed until well blended.

5. Wrap bottom of cheesecake pan with heavy-duty foil, pressing it up the sides. Pour batter over crust. Put cheesecake pan in a 12- by 15-inch roasting pan at least 2 inches deep. Set pans in oven and pour enough boiling water into roasting pan to come halfway up sides of cheesecake pan.

6. Bake until cake barely jiggles in the center when gently shaken, about 55 minutes. Remove pans from oven. Lift cheesecake pan from roasting pan and let cool completely on a rack, about 1 hour, then chill until cold, at least 1½ hours, or up to 3 days (cover once cold).

7. Up to 6 hours before serving, cut around inside of pan rim to release cake; remove rim. With a pastry bag, pipe dollops of maple cream onto cake. Or serve maple cream separately, to spoon onto each wedge.

Per serving: 418 cal., 60% (252 cal.) from fat; 6.2 g protein; 28 g fat (16 g sat.); 38 g carbo (1 g fiber); 239 mg sodium; 130 mg chol.

Pecan crust. Whirl ¼ cup coarsely chopped **pecans** in a blender until finely ground; you should have ¼ cup. In a bowl, mix pecans, 1¼ cups fine **graham cracker crumbs,** 2 tablespoons **sugar,** and 5 tablespoons melted **butter.** Pour into a 9-inch cheesecake pan with removable rim (2¼ in. tall). Press mixture evenly over bottom of pan.

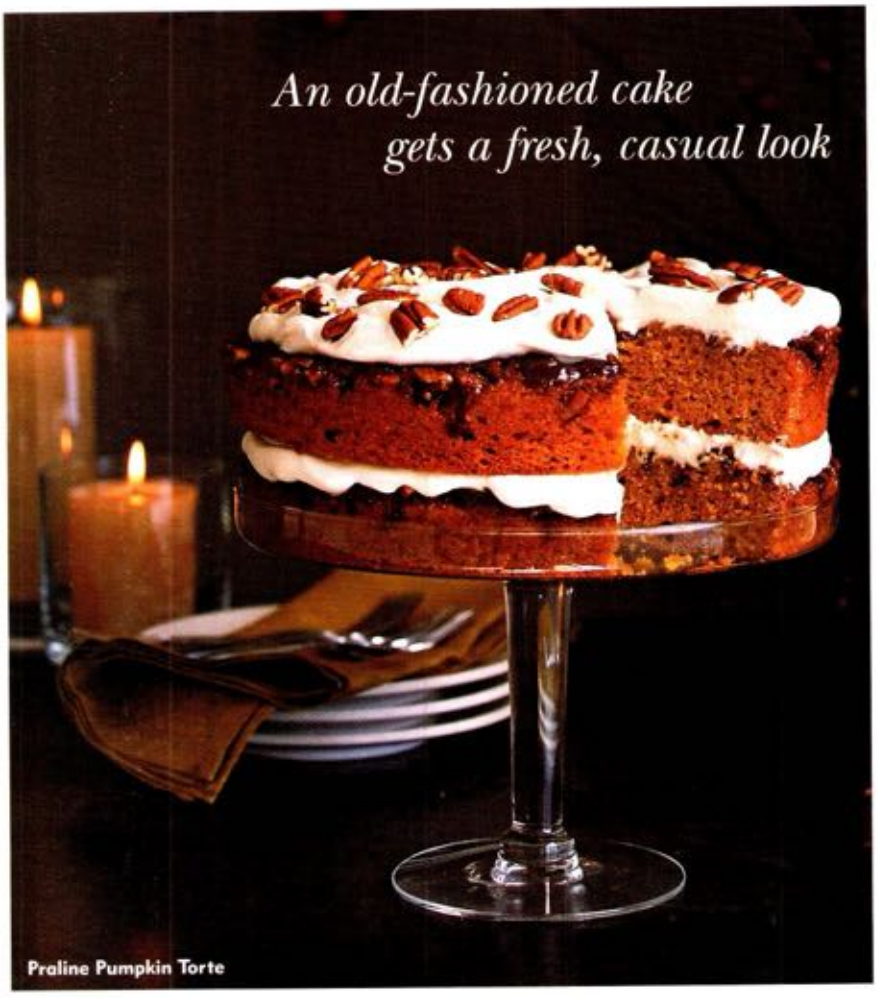
Maple cream. In a bowl, with a mixer on high speed, beat ¾ cup **whipping cream** until stiff peaks form. On low speed, beat in ¼ cup **maple syrup** just until blended.

DESSERT RUNNER-UP
KATHY MASUR, BROOMFIELD, CO

Praline Pumpkin Torte

This showstopping dessert came from Kathy Masur's Aunt Katy—"a wonder in the kitchen." Although her aunt passed away years ago, Masur still makes the pumpkin torte every year as a tribute.

PREP AND COOK TIME: About 1 hour, plus 1½ hours to cool cakes
MAKES: About 12 servings
NOTES: You can bake the cakes (through step 3) up to 1 day ahead; cover and store at room temperature. Up to 6 hours ahead, assemble layers; cover with a large inverted bowl or pan and chill.



Praline Pumpkin Torte

- ¾ cup firmly packed brown sugar
- ⅓ cup butter
- 3 tablespoons plus 1¾ cups whipping cream
- 1 cup chopped pecans
- 4 large eggs
- 1⅔ cups granulated sugar
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 2 cups canned cooked pumpkin
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 2 teaspoons pumpkin pie spice (or ¾ teaspoon *each* ground cinnamon, ginger, and nutmeg)
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¼ cup powdered sugar

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Butter two 9-inch round cake pans. Line bottoms of pans with cooking parchment. In a heavy 1- to 2-quart pan over low heat, stir brown sugar, butter, and 3 tablespoons whipping cream until melted and blended, about 5 minutes. Pour half the brown sugar mixture into each of the cake pans. Sprinkle ¾ cup chopped pecans evenly into pans.

2. In a bowl, with a spoon, beat eggs, granulated sugar, and oil until well blended. Stir in pumpkin and ½ teaspoon vanilla. In a bowl, whisk together flour, baking powder, pumpkin pie spice, baking soda, and salt to blend. Whisk dry ingredients into pumpkin mixture until well blended. Pour half the batter into each of the pans; smooth top.

3. Bake until a toothpick inserted in center of cakes comes out clean, 30 to

FOOD STYLING: JUDI ORLICK; PROP STYLING: CATHERINE DILL

35 minutes. Let cool in pans on racks about 5 minutes, then invert onto racks and remove pans and paper. Let cool completely, about 1½ hours.

4. Up to 6 hours before serving, in a bowl, with an electric mixer on high speed, beat remaining 1¾ cups whipping cream until soft peaks form. On low speed, beat in powdered sugar and remaining ½ teaspoon vanilla just until blended. Set one cake layer, pecan praline side up, on a serving platter. Spread two-thirds of the whipped cream mixture over the top. Set second layer, praline side up, on top. Cover with remaining whipped cream mixture. Sprinkle with remaining ¼ cup chopped pecans.

Per serving: 676 cal., 59% (396 cal.) from fat; 6.3 g protein; 44 g fat (14 g sat.); 66 g carbo (2 g fiber); 481 mg sodium; 129 mg chol.

DESSERT RUNNER-UP
EDWINA GADSBY, GREAT FALLS, MT

Pumpkin Chai Pots de Crème

Last year, inspired by the popularity of Starbucks' pumpkin lattes, Edwina Gadsby decided to incorporate those flavors into her favorite dessert, pot de crème. "My sister Leanne, a huge chai fan, suggested I try it with chai instead of coffee, and everyone loved it," she says.

PREP AND COOK TIME: About 1¼ hours, plus 1½ hours to cool and chill
MAKES: 6 servings
NOTES: You can make the custards and pumpkin seed brittle up to 1 day ahead. Cover and chill custards; store brittle airtight at room temperature.

- 1 cup whipping cream
- 1 cup whole milk
- ¼ cup firmly packed light brown sugar
- 6 large egg yolks
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- ½ cup canned cooked pumpkin
- ⅓ cup chai tea concentrate or strong brewed chai tea
- 2 teaspoons grated orange peel or Meyer lemon peel
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- Pumpkin seed brittle (recipe follows)

1. Preheat oven to 325° (convection not recommended). In a 2- to 3-quart pan over medium heat, stir cream, milk, and brown sugar until sugar is dissolved, 2 to 4 minutes. Remove from heat.

Pumpkin Chai Pots de Crème

2. In a bowl, whisk egg yolks until light yellow. Add granulated sugar and whisk until blended. Gradually whisk a fourth of the hot cream mixture into the egg mixture. Then slowly whisk in remaining cream mixture and the pumpkin, chai, orange peel, and vanilla.

3. Divide mixture among six ramekins (¾ cup). Set in a 12- by 16-inch roasting pan at least 2 inches deep. Set pan in oven and pour in boiling water to halfway up sides of ramekins.

4. Bake until custards barely jiggle when gently shaken, 45 to 50 minutes. Lift ramekins out of water and let cool on racks for 30 minutes, then chill until cold, at least 1 hour. Cover when cold.

5. Shortly before serving, garnish with shards of pumpkin seed brittle.

Per serving: 382 cal., 57% (216 cal.) from fat; 8 g protein; 24 g fat (11 g sat.); 35 g carbo (0.7 g fiber); 48 mg sodium; 263 mg chol.

Pumpkin seed brittle. In a heavy 6- to 8-inch frying pan over medium-high heat, stir ⅓ cup **sugar** and ¼ cup **water** until sugar is dissolved, 1 to 2 minutes. Cook without stirring, shaking pan often, until mixture is a deep amber color, 5 to 10 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in ½ cup **hulled roasted pumpkin seeds** (sometimes sold as pepitas). Pour onto a 12- by 15-inch piece of buttered foil and spread thin. Let cool until hard, 6 to 10 minutes. Cut or break brittle into about ½-inch shards. Store airtight, if not using at once.

FOOD STYLING: JUDI ORLICK. PROP STYLING: CATHERINE DILL

For more great Thanksgiving contest recipes, go to www.sunset.com/thanksgiving2005