

Microwave oven is perfect for preparing springtime brunch

Good food, lively conversation and a relaxed atmosphere are all important components of today's entertaining scene. Yet bringing them all together on a tight budget and with a busy schedule can be a challenge to even the most resourceful hostess.

One solution many contemporary cooks are turning to for easy and economical entertaining is to extend the invitation for a weekend brunch.

Just right for a carefree spring brunch is Creamed Bacon and Asparagus on Corn Muffins. In this offering, bacon, a favorite of microwave cooks, is given special treatment when paired with asparagus in a creamy sauce that's flavored with Parmesan cheese.

OR FOR A heartier brunch, invite those special friends to join you for Spicy Beef Strips. Thin strips of top round steak along with onion and garlic are quickly cooked by microwaves, then combined with a tomato sauce that's uniquely seasoned with cinnamon, cummin and cloves and studded with raisins. All is served on a bed of fluffy rice.

While brunch is usually thought of as a meal for entertaining, don't overlook it as a special time for the family to get together to talk, relax and enjoy special foods.

CREAMED BACON AND ASPARAGUS ON CORN MUFFINS

12 ounces sliced bacon, cut into 2-inch pieces
1 package (10 ounces) frozen cut asparagus
2 tablespoons butter or margarine
2 tablespoons flour
1 1/2 cups milk 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
4 corn muffins

Place bacon in 11 1/2 x 7 1/2-inch microwave-safe baking dish. Cover with absorbent paper and microwave at HIGH 2 minutes. Stir to separate and continue cooking at HIGH 10 minutes, or until bacon is crisp, stirring every 2 1/2 minutes. Drain bacon on absorbent paper; reserve. Place asparagus in microwave-safe dish. Cover with plastic wrap, venting one corner and microwave at HIGH 7 minutes, stirring after 4 minutes. Drain and reserve. Melt butter or margarine in 4-cup microwave-safe measure at HIGH 1 minute. Blend in flour; gradually stir in milk. Microwave at HIGH 3 minutes, stirring after 1 1/2 minutes. Continue cooking 2 minutes, stirring after 1 minute. Stir in cheese, bacon and asparagus; cover. Heat corn muffins at HIGH 45 seconds. Serve sauce over split muffins. 4 servings.

SPICY BEEF STRIPS

1 pound beef top round steak, cut 1-inch thick
Microwaved Rice* or hot cooked rice
1 tbsp butter or margarine
1 medium onion, sliced 1/4 inch thick
1 clove garlic, minced

1 tsp salt
1 can (10 ounces) tomato puree
2 tbsp red wine vinegar
1 tsp sugar
1/4 tsp ground cinnamon
1/4 tsp ground cummin
Dash ground cloves
1/4 cup raisins

Prepare Microwaved Rice. Slice top round steak in strips 1/4-inch thick. Place butter in 11 1/2 x 7 1/2-inch microwave-safe baking dish; microwave at HIGH 1 minute. Add beef strips, onion and garlic. Cover with plastic wrap, venting one corner; microwave at MEDIUM (315 watts or 50 percent power) 8 minutes, stirring after 4 minutes. Sprinkle salt over beef strips. Meanwhile, combine tomato

puree, vinegar, sugar, cinnamon, cummin and cloves. Add tomato mixture and raisins to beef, stirring to combine. Cover with plastic wrap, venting one corner; microwave at MEDIUM 6 minutes, stirring after 3 minutes. Serve over rice. 4 servings.

Note: Partially freeze steak to assist slicing into thin strips.

*MICROWAVED RICE

1 1/2 cups water
1/2 cup rice
2 tsp butter or margarine
1/2 tsp salt

Combine water, rice, butter and salt in a 3-cup microwave-safe baking dish. Cover and microwave at HIGH 5 minutes. Rotate dish 1/4 turn and microwave at MEDIUM 15 minutes. Fluff with fork.

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(F39)

Cookbook contains nutrition information

Chinese cooking expert and author, Christine Liu, has released her second cookbook called "More Nutritional Chinese Cooking."

Unlike many cookbooks, it contains accurate nutritional information about each recipe. Nutritional counts of the calories, protein, carbohydrates, fat, cholesterol, calcium, iron, fiber and vitamins B1, B2, A and C are documented.

"By providing specific, nutritional information," said Mrs. Liu, "cooks are able to enjoy and appreciate the low cholesterol, low fat advantages of cooking in the Chinese tradition. It's easy to see that Chinese dishes are both delicious and nutritious."

IN ADDITION, "More Nutritional Chinese Cooking" contains information about fats, suggested diet menus and recommended daily requirements of calories, certain vitamins and minerals. Other sections outline Chinese customs and pleasantries along with traditional methods of preparation. Recipes are easy-to-follow and illustrated with decorative paper-cut designs by China's leading artists. Photographs from Mrs. Liu's recent trips to China are also included.

Christine Liu received her master's degree in nutrition and public health from the University of Michigan and lives in Ann Arbor with her husband, Dr. Stephen Liu.



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pilot light
Greg Melikov

Slow cooker is old friend

The Crock-Pot is one of my oldest cooking aids. I believe I received it as a gift, and I know it has outlived a coffee-maker, two toasters and quite a few pots and pans.

However, it is my wife who uses the stoneware slow cooker the most. I call it her kitchen stand-in. Her favorite Crock-Pot vegetable is spinach. She loves it creamed and I have prepared several variations, including a casserole that features cottage and American cheeses.

Anita also is crazy about black-eyed peas. Following a friend's advice, she made a batch, Southern style, that cooked overnight.

She just soaked the beans several hours and put them on low heat before retiring. They cooked about 12 hours.

When discussing bean recipes, one pet peeve comes to mind. Many recipes call for one pound, but I'm unable to find 16-oz. packages on supermarket shelves.

Beans come in 14-ounce packages; they come in 14-ounce packages. "How do we figure out one pound?" Anita asked before tackling the black-eyed peas.

"Easy," I said, pouring a 12-ounce package into a two-cup measuring cup. "If 12 ounces of black-eyed peas equal two cups, then one pound must equal 2 1/2 cups."

"How did you do that?" she asked.
"Old math."

SOUTHERN BLACK-EYED PEAS
2 1/2 cups black-eyed peas, presoaked and drained
4 cups water
1/4 tsp. salt
1/4 tsp. black pepper
1 large onion, chopped
2 celery ribs, chopped
1/2 lb. salt pork, cut up

Place black-eyed peas in Crock-Pot, add water and stir in remaining ingredients. Cover and cook on high 2 hours, then on low 8 hours. Can serve over cooked rice. Serves 6.

SPINACH CASSEROLE

2 pkgs. (10 oz.) frozen chopped spinach, thawed and drained
1 container (1 lb.) cream-style cottage cheese
1/2 cup butter, cut in pieces
1 1/2 cups cubed American cheese
3 eggs, beaten
1/4 cup all-purpose flour
1 tsp. salt

Thoroughly combine all ingredients in large mixing bowl and pour into greased Crock-Pot. Cover and cook on high 1 hour, then on low 4 to 5 hours. Serves 6.

Readers are invited to send questions, suggestions or comments about food, cooking and shopping to Pilot Light, Greg Melikov, 650 NW 133rd St., Miami, Fla. 33186. Enclose self-addressed stamped envelope for individual replies.