

WHY NOT GIVE A BRUNCH?

Got those mid-winter blues? No need to mope! Lift yourself out of the doldrums with a glorious mid-winter get-together. No matter how bitter the weather outside, everyone can be snug and cozy inside, leisurely enjoying good food and good friends.

But, if a mountain of incoming holiday bills makes you hesitant to throw a party, take heart. By planning a brunch, entertaining can be easy, economical and elegant.

Seasoned party givers know that adding just one spectacular dish to the menu can elevate even the most ordinary fare in the eyes of the guest. Here are some exciting brunch recipes that give a simple meal party air-while keeping your post-holiday finances in check. Each is a showpiece in itself.

What would you like to serve as the star of your brunch? A light and airy soufflé? A dazzling fruit compote? A maple-iced yeast bread-rolled up around a moist and tangy fruit filling? Take your pick! Any one of these can make your party sensational.

For an exquisite, yet inexpensive entree, combine two classics. When you fold Shrimp de Jonghe ingredients into a cheese soufflé, the eggs will stretch a small package of shrimp to feed four to six people. The end result is the ultimate in elegance at an economical cost.

You don't have to admit to your guests that this streamlined soufflé recipe is surprisingly easy to make. It's simply a thick, egg-yolk-enriched white sauce leavened with stiffly beaten egg whites. If the thought of making a soufflé terrifies you, just follow the recipe below for magnificently high results the first time around.

While a soufflé is best baked as soon as you prepare it, you can hold it up to two hours in the refrigerator, if necessary. But, do serve it immediately after baking to retain its puffy golden crown. Call your guests to the table just before you remove the soufflé from the oven.

With eggs on hand in the refrigerator, dozens of elegant, yet low-cost brunch specialties are possible. In addition to soufflés, consider quiches, stratas and omelets.

Would you like your brunch to highlight a fabulous fruit course? Especially during the wintertime when fruit choices are limited, a dish with tangy-sweet flavor is most welcome. Take advantage of the marvelous opportunity to capture the flavor of those sun-ripened plums of summer by serving moist and delicious prunes.

Plump prunes in a zippy orange and ginger sauce, add winter's fresh citrus fruits and you've created a Festive Fruit Compote. What a wonderful combination! When served in a sparkling glass dish, the jeweled tones of the citrus sections contrast dramatically against the glistening dark color of the prunes, giving this budget-minded dish luxurious eye appeal.

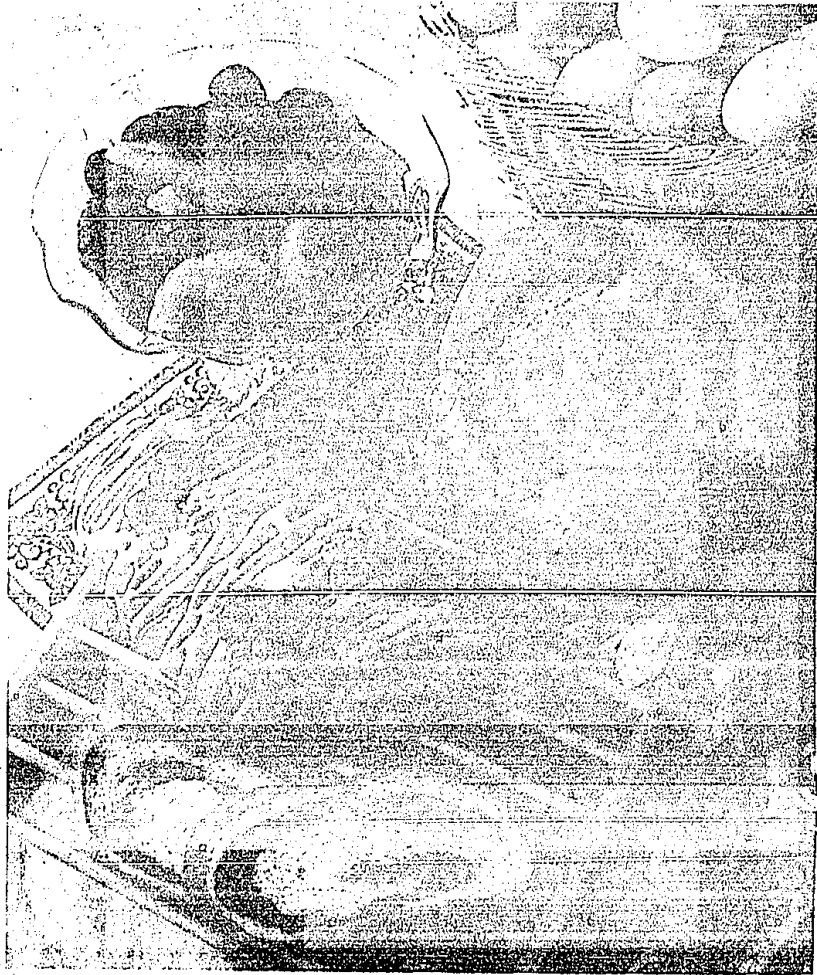
If it has been awhile since you've enjoyed prunes, you're missing a good bet. They are rich in natural fiber, high in vitamin A and a good source of iron and other nutrients. Keep prunes on hand for quick brunch ideas, from appetizers to desserts. Their mellow sweetness combines beautifully with a variety of flavors.

Would you like your spectacular brunch to showcase a fragrant, homemade yeast bread, fresh from the oven? A bread that wins raves is Vermont Maple Swirl, rich with eggs and tangy with a plum-sweet prune-walnut filling. You'll find the unique flavor combination of prunes and maple is truly delicious. Vermont Maple Swirl is a dazzling showpiece when drizzled with maple icing and garnished with prunes and nuts. Slice the bread on the diagonal to show off the beautiful pinwheel design created by the dark filling against the golden, egg-enriched dough. Serve the bread with the meal or as a dessert with coffee afterwards.

Although some people are reluctant to try a yeast bread, they really aren't all that difficult to make and the impressive results are well worth the extra effort. Just be sure to heat the liquids to the proper temperature. To create a warm place for rising, put the dough in a cold oven and place a pan of hot water on the rack below.

Make just one of these spectacular menu items or all three. However you choose to present your brunch, you'll find each item is delicious, kind to the budget and nutritious. And each is well suited to a winter brunch menu.

So why not start with these recipes and plan a brunch to while away those bleak months ahead? There's hardly a better way to banish your mid-winter blues.



SHRIMP DE JONGHE SOUFFLE

- Butter 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- Grated Parmesan cheese 1/2 teaspoon paprika
- 1/3 cup butter 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/3 cup all-purpose flour 6 eggs, separated
- 1/4 cups milk 3/4 teaspoon cream of tartar
- 1/4 cup dry white wine 1 package (6 oz.) tiny frozen
- 1/2 cup (2 oz.) shredded Gruyere cooked shrimp, thawed
- or Swiss cheese and drained
- 1 tablespoon parsley flakes

Butter bottom and sides of a 2 to 2-1/2 quart soufflé dish or straight-sided casserole. Dust with Parmesan cheese. Prepare a collar by making a 4-inch wide band of triple-thickness aluminum foil long enough to go around dish and overlap 2 inches. Butter one side of band and dust with Parmesan cheese. Wrap band around dish, dusted side in, and fasten with straight pins, paper clips or string. Collar should stand at least 2 inches above rim of dish. Set aside.

In medium saucepan over medium-high heat, melt butter. Blend in flour. Cook, stirring constantly, until mixture is smooth and bubbly. Stir in milk all at once. Cook and stir until mixture boils and is smooth and thickened. Stir in wine. Remove from heat. Stir in Gruyere cheese and seasonings until cheese is melted. Set aside.

In large mixing bowl, beat egg whites with cream of tartar at high speed until stiff but not dry, just until whites no longer slip when bowl is tilted. Thoroughly blend egg yolks and shrimp into reserved sauce. Gently, but thoroughly, fold yolk mixture into whites. Carefully pour into prepared dish. For a "top hat," hold spoon upright and circle mixture to make a ring about 1 inch from side of dish and 1 inch deep.

Bake in a preheated 350°F oven until puffy, delicately browned and soufflé shakes slightly when oven rack is moved gently back and forth, about 35 to 45 minutes. Quickly, but gently, remove collar. Serve immediately. Makes 4 to 6 servings

FESTIVE FRUIT COMPOTE

- 1-1/2 cups (about 9 ounces) pitted prunes
- 3/4 cup orange juice
- 1/3 cup water
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 3 tablespoons orange-flavored liqueur
- 2 teaspoons grated fresh ginger*
- 1 teaspoon grated orange peel
- 3 grapefruits
- 2 oranges
- Mint sprigs

In small saucepan combine prunes, orange juice and water. Bring just to boiling. Remove from heat. Gently stir in honey, then the liqueur, ginger and orange peel. Cool, then cover and chill up to 2 days. Several hours before serving: Peel and section grapefruits and oranges. Combine citrus fruits with prune mixture. Cover and chill. Garnish with mint. If you wish, serve fruit mixture in grapefruit shell halves with membranes removed. Makes 6 servings.

*If fresh ginger is unavailable, substitute 1 teaspoon ground ginger, stirring it into prunes, orange juice and water before bringing to boil.

VERMONT MAPLE SWIRL

- 3-1/2 to 4 cups all-purpose flour, divided
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1 package active dry yeast
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1/3 cup butter, softened
- 4 eggs, divided
- Prune-Walnut Filling (recipe follows)
- Maple Icing (recipe follows)
- Halved pitted prunes and walnut halves (for garnish)

In large bowl of electric mixer combine 3/4 cup of the flour, the sugar, yeast and salt; mix to blend thoroughly. In small saucepan combine milk and butter. Heat over low heat until very warm, 120 to 130°F. Butter need not melt completely. Beating at medium speed, gradually add milk mixture to yeast mixture. Beat 2 minutes, scraping bowl as needed. Add 3 of the eggs, then 1 more cup of the flour. Beat at high speed 2 minutes. Mix in enough additional flour to make a stiff dough, about 1-1/2 cups. Turn out onto floured board. Knead 8 to 10 minutes, working in as much of the remaining flour as needed to make a smooth, non-sticky dough. Place in greased bowl, turning to grease top. Cover with plastic wrap and towel. Let rise in warm place until doubled, about 1-1/2 hours. Punch dough down. On lightly floured board, stretch and roll out dough into a rectangle 12 x 16 inches. Spread evenly with Prune-Walnut Filling to within 1/2 inch of edges. Starting from long end, roll as for a jelly roll. Moisten edge with water and pinch seam to seal completely. Tuck ends under and pinch to seal. Gently place diagonally, seam side down, on greased baking sheet. Cover with towel and let rise in warm place until almost doubled, about 1 hour. Brush generously with remaining egg, beaten. Bake in middle of preheated 350°F oven 25 to 35 minutes until evenly browned and loaf sounds hollow when tapped. Remove to rack to cool. Drizzle with Maple Icing and garnish with prune and walnut halves. To serve, cut into diagonal slices. Makes 12 servings.

PRUNE-WALNUT FILLING:

Combine 1-1/2 cups (about 9 ounces) pitted prunes, 1/2 cup water and 1/2 teaspoon maple flavoring in container of electric blender. Blend until almost smooth, turning on and off and scraping sides of container as needed. Transfer to bowl; mix thoroughly with 1 cup chopped walnuts.

MAPLE ICING:

In small bowl mix 1 cup powdered sugar, 1 to 2 tablespoons milk and 1/4 teaspoon maple flavoring until smooth and consistency desired for drizzling.

MENU

Shrimp de Jonghe Soufflé
Festive Fruit Compote
Vermont Maple Swirl
Choice of Syrup and/or Whipped Cream
Milk, Coffee or Tea
(See recipe above)

MENU

Festive Fruit Compote
French Toast
Choice of Syrup and/or Whipped Cream
Milk, Coffee or Tea
(See recipe above)

MENU

Vermont Maple Swirl
French Toast
Choice of Syrup and/or Whipped Cream
Milk, Coffee or Tea
(See recipe above)