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Entertain Away The

"WINTER TIME BLUES"

Fired of those "winter time blues?" Use your imagination to create new ways to beat those "blues." Start by planning some get-togethers with friends.

For sports fans this is definitely a time of delight. Gathering to watch college and pro football games is always fun. It's also basketball and hockey season. If you're not a big sports fan there are plenty of other opportunities to share with friends. Try hosting your own movie night; invite some friends over, rent a movie and pop it in the VCR.

No matter what the reason for getting together, you'll want to feed your guests. And after a long day or week at work, putting on a party may not be an inviting prospect.

Dips are a favorite party food and easy to prepare. But don't rely on old standbys — try something new. Mexican Bean Dip will definitely be a crowd pleaser. Pork and beans make this dip rich in flavor, high in fiber and low in fat and cholesterol. And with the aid of a microwave it takes only a few minutes to prepare. This zesty dip, of taco seasoning, green pepper, onion and Cheddar cheese will go great with a variety of dippers. If your taste buds beg for something a little milder, try Easy Bean Dip. Made with lemon juice, sesame oil, soy sauce, garlic and onions it's a great go-with for pita bread.

Finger foods are a must at any party. They're easy to prepare and fun to eat. For example, Chicken Gourmet Nuggets are bite-size morsels of crispy chicken filled with a variety of savory mixtures. There are Mexican Style, Ham and Cheese, Spinach and Herb and Pizza Style. The nuggets heat quickly in a conventional or microwave oven.

Antipasto Kabobs, made with California grown marinated artichoke hearts, sliced pepperoni, cherry tomatoes and pitted whole ripe olives, are another party favorite. Tender, bite-sized marinated artichoke hearts, grown in the cool climate of the Monterey Bay area, are perfect for these kabobs. Or enjoy marinated artichoke hearts in Artichoke Squares. They can be prepared easily in a conventional or microwave oven.

To make preparation and clean-up easy, you'll want to use as few dishes as possible. Microwave bowls are a hostess and host's dream. The ultimate in cooking versatility — you can use these bowls in a conventional or microwave oven and also place them under the broiler.

Don't let winter dampen your spirits. Get together with friends, enjoy good food and celebrate the season with lots of fun to brighten-up everyone's days.

Micro-Tips To Help You Entertain

Entertaining is easy with a microwave oven. Here are some helpful tips to make food preparation for your next get-together a breeze.

- When cooking dips or sauces in your microwave, always stir warmed outer edges into cooler inner areas. This will increase speed and provide for even cooking.
- Use the appropriate utensils in your microwave oven. Glass or glass-ceramic dishes are ideal because microwaves can easily pass through them.
- Cooking for a crowd? Remember, only a set number of microwaves enter an oven at any one time. Therefore, if you intend to cook several items in the same microwave, you'll need to allow for more cooking time.
- When reheating foods, cover them to prevent spatters.

Mexican Bean Dip

- 1 can (16 ounces) Pork & Beans in Tomato Sauce
- 2 tablespoons taco seasoning mix
- ¼ cup chopped green pepper
- 1 tablespoon chopped onion
- Shredded Cheddar cheese for garnish
- Chopped green pepper
- Tortilla chips and assorted fresh vegetables for dippers

Microwave Directions:

- In covered blender or food processor, combine beans and taco seasoning mix. Blend until almost smooth.
- Spoon bean mixture into 2-cup bowl. Stir in green pepper and onion. Cover. Microwave on HIGH 2 minutes or until hot. Stir well.
- Garnish with cheese and additional chopped green pepper. Microwave on HIGH 45 seconds or until cheese begins to melt. Serve with dippers.

Conventional Directions:

- In covered blender or food processor, combine beans and taco seasoning mix. Blend until almost smooth.
- Spoon bean mixture into 1 quart saucepan. Stir in green pepper and onion. Heat to boiling. Reduce heat to low; simmer 5 minutes, stirring often.
- Spoon bean mixture into 2-cup bowl. Garnish with cheese and additional chopped green pepper. Serve with dippers. Makes 1½ cups.

Antipasto Kabobs

- On 6-inch bamboo skewers, arrange a combination of drained marinated artichoke hearts, sliced pepperoni, cherry tomatoes and pitted whole ripe olives. Brush with marinade from the artichokes.
- To Serve Hot: On a platter, microwave on HIGH 30 seconds or until hot.

Easy Bean Dip

(Not in Photo)

- 1 can (16 ounces) Pork & Beans in Tomato Sauce
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon sesame oil, optional
- 1 teaspoon soy sauce
- 1 small clove garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon chopped green onions
- Pita bread (sandwich pockets), cut into quarters for dippers

- In covered blender or food processor, combine beans, lemon juice, sesame oil, soy sauce and garlic. Blend until almost smooth. Spoon into bowl.
- Stir in onions; cover. Refrigerate at least 1 hour to blend flavors. Serve with pita bread. Makes 1½ cups.

Artichoke Squares

(Not in Photo)

- 2 jars (6 ounces each) Marinated Artichoke Hearts
- 2 cups shredded sharp Cheddar cheese (½ Pound)
- 2 eggs, slightly beaten
- 1 tablespoon chopped parsley
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 cup chopped onion
- ¼ teaspoon oregano leaves, crushed
- 2 tablespoons fine dry bread crumbs
- 1 tablespoon melted butter or margarine

Microwave Directions:

- Drain artichokes, reserving marinade. Chop artichokes; place in bowl. Stir in cheese, eggs, parsley and pepper.
- In 8-inch square non-stick baking dish, combine onion, oregano and 2 tablespoons reserved marinade. Cover with waxed paper. Microwave on HIGH 4 minutes or until tender. Stir artichoke mixture into baking dish.
- Combine bread crumbs with melted butter. Top artichoke mixture with bread crumbs. Cover with waxed paper. Microwave on MEDIUM 10 minutes, rotating dish ¼ turn once during heating.
- Uncover; microwave 2 minutes or until hot and bubbly. Let stand 5 minutes before cutting into squares.

Conventional Directions:

- Substitute soft dry bread crumbs for fine dry bread crumbs and 1 tablespoon firm butter for melted butter.
- Drain artichokes, reserving marinade. Chop artichokes; place in bowl. Stir in cheese, eggs, parsley and pepper.
- Spoon 2 tablespoons reserved marinade into a skillet. Over medium heat in hot marinade, cook onion with oregano until tender; add to chopped artichoke mixture.
- Pour into 8-inch square non-sticking baking dish. Sprinkle top with bread crumbs; dot with butter.
- Bake at 350° F. for 30 minutes or until hot and lightly browned. Cut into squares. Makes 20 appetizers.