

Garnishes make dishes special

AP — Try these simple presentation and garnish suggestions from Janet Herwig, food stylist in the Better Homes and Gardens test kitchen.

LOOK AHEAD

• Plan to garnish with an ingredient that's already in the recipe, such as celery leaves, fresh herbs, lemon or orange slices, carrot curls.

• Have on hand some leaf lettuce or other greens, red and/or green grapes, cherry tomatoes, mint leaves, canned crabapples, oranges and lemons.

PLATTER PRESENTATIONS

• Wreath the turkey platter with fresh sage or other herbs, glazed squash rings, poached apple and pear wedges, kumquat flowers, glazed sweet potato slices, roasted grapes, crabapples and orange slices, baked apples filled with mashed sweet potatoes.

• Steamed vegetables, such as shredded zucchini, sweet potatoes, or french-style green beans, make a colorful base for chicken breasts, fish, chops, or other meats.

NATURALS

• Edible serving containers are fun. Present dip in a green or sweet red pepper, spread in a seeded small squash. A hollowed-out round bread loaf holds appetizer-size sandwiches or cheese dip. Convert a pumpkin or large, colorful squash into a stunning soup tureen.

• Flowers make lovely garnishes, but choose only those grown for use with food, not those that have been treated with pesticides that might leave harmful residues.

• Leaves safe to use with food include thyme, lemon, kale, herbs and flowering herbs.

SLICK AND QUICK

• For greater interest, place a

garnish at one end or side rather than the center, or line the bowl or platter with greens.

• Piping quickly gives shape to a creamy, thick mixture. Try it with appetizer spreads, butter, cream cheese, cream puff dough, deviled egg filling, mashed potatoes, mashed sweet potatoes and whipped cream.

• Sift powdered sugar or unsweetened cocoa powder lightly over plates before placing torte or cake slices on top. Use a dolly as a stencil if you like.

• Use egg substitute instead of raw eggs to brush grapes and flowers before frosting with sugar. Dilute egg substitute with an equal amount of water.

CUTOUTS

• Melt semisweet chocolate pieces. Pour onto a waxed-paper-lined baking sheet; spread ¼ to ½ inch thick. Chill 15 minutes or until almost set. Firmly press hors d'oeuvre cutters into chocolate. Chill 10 minutes more. Remove the cutouts with a toothpick. Be careful not to touch the surface of the chocolate; fingerprints will show.

• More cutouts: Use hors d'oeuvre or small cookie cutters to cut trims from citrus peel; apple, beet, carrot, or jicama slices; jellyed cranberry sauce; butter; cheese; or pastry.

USING GREENS

• Looking for a change from parsley? Try celery leaves, curly endive, or leaf lettuce. Cilantro makes an attractive garnish but wilts quickly.

• Place salad or dessert on a glass plate set on top of ferns or other florist greens arranged on a metal or china underliner. For buffet service, use large plates or platters.

Sweet potatoes versatile

When Columbus discovered America in 1492, he also discovered a yellow-brown vegetable, the sweet potato. Guess what he did? He took some roots home with him.

By the 1600s the delicious, edible sweet potatoes were a leading crop of the Virginia colonies, and by the 1900s more than 200 varieties were grown in the South. Sweet potatoes are available year round but are most plentiful from September to December for holiday eating. However, sweet potatoes are great for eating all year.

Sweet potatoes are versatile, easy to prepare and have great potential. They can be served as an appetizer, salad, main dish or dessert. They seem to have taken a turn for the better because of the name or the heavy amounts of sweeter that is added to them. Actually, a sweet potato has no more calories by weight than a white potato. As with other potatoes, it's what you add to them that makes the fat and calories add up.

The darker the orange color of the vegetable, the more beta carotene (which the body transforms into vitamin A). A serving of one sweet potato has two to five times the recommended amounts of beta carotene.

A sweet potato serving has more

potassium than an orange, plus some dietary fiber. It also contains about half the amount recommended for a daily allowance of vitamin C and about 120 to 140 calories. All this nutrition inside the skin of a sweet potato!

SWEET POTATOES come in two versions: the light or pale-skinned type with yellow pulp that remains firm when cooked, or the bright orange, more moist, rough-skinned variety that becomes soft when cooked. The moist, flaked potato tastes sweeter than dry varieties due to the starch converting to sugar while cooking. Some people call the softer, more moist version a "yarn." But a true yarn is really a starchy white root grown primarily in the tropics of West Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America.

Select well-shaped (tapered toward the ends), firm, plump, brightly colored skins that are free from decay. Do not choose one that has cuts, holes or blemishes. Best supplies of potatoes generally are in the winter months. Store in a cool, dry, dark, well-ventilated place. Do not store in refrigerator. If you have purchased more than you can use in a short period of time, cook, mash



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and freeze for later use.

Cook a sweet potato in the skin to help preserve the vitamins. Treat just like a white potato. The skins will slip off easily after cooking, but it is also edible. Since the skin is a little tough you may want to rub with a little margarine and wrap it in foil to bake. Place sweet potatoes on a baking sheet and bake at 375 degrees for about one hour or until tender. To boil, place chunks in saucepan (leaving skin on), add water, bring to a boil, cover, reduce heat and simmer until tender. Drain well. Slip the skin and use in whatever dish you are making. Pierce sweet potatoes several times with a fork before microwaving to prevent exploding. Microwave on high six to seven minutes per pound.

ENJOY SWEET potatoes combined with white potatoes to make your favorite potato salad recipe. As a main dish, bake or microwave in their skins. Scoop out the pulp and mash it, add pineapple or orange juice, or diced apples and raisins with spices, and return the pulp mixture to skin and reheat, and you have twice-baked sweet potatoes. Mashed

sweet potatoes can be put into a casserole. Add fruits, juice, spices and top with chopped nuts for a great side dish (skip the marshmallows). Mix shredded sweet potatoes with chopped apple, flour and onion and fry as pancake in a little melted margarine or oil. Shred raw into salads for crunch, or pare and slice and serve raw with a dip. Raw sweet potatoes taste like a sweet raw carrot. They will darken quickly so soak in water before serving and refresh frequently if served on a raw vegetable tray.

Soup can be made by pureeing baked or boiled sweet potatoes. Add defatted chicken stock, herbs and spices, and before serving stir in low-fat buttermilk or yogurt.

Puree sweet potatoes for pies, breads, biscuits, muffins, cookies, cakes, croquettes and custards. Sweet spices such as cinnamon, ginger, cloves, nutmeg and allspice complement sweet potatoes very nicely. Remember, a sweet potato by itself is not fattening. It's the caramelized or candied versions that add calories. Be like Columbus and take some nutrient-dense sweet potatoes home.

Reduced-fat cheese used in apple flan

Food companies are now offering reduced-calorie versions of popular dessert ingredients. Apple and Ricotta Flan uses the sweet flavor of fruit and reduced-fat ricotta cheese.

APPLE AND RICOTTA FLAN
One 2-pound container reduced-fat ricotta cheese
Butter or vegetable cooking spray
2 eggs
1 cup peeled and chopped tart apple
¼ cup confectioners' sugar
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
Grated peel of 1 lemon
¼ teaspoon cinnamon
Pinch nutmeg

Place ricotta in a sieve set over a bowl. Cover and refrigerate. Let

drain several hours or overnight. Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Butter a 9-inch springform pan.

In food processor or blender, process ricotta until smooth. Add remaining ingredients; process until well blended. Pour into prepared pan.

Place pan on cookie sheet; bake 1 hour and 10 minutes or until set and lightly browned. Cool flan on wire rack to room temperature. Cover and refrigerate.

Run a knife around the edge of flan to loosen, remove sides of pan. Garnish with thinly sliced red or green apple, if desired. Makes 10 servings.

(Recipe from: Pulio Dairy Products.)

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