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shows throughout the New Year's Brunch Menu she planned.

Cohen recommends setting up a basic fruit juice and coffee bar for guests to help themselves. A crustless quiche made with cheese and served with Brazilian Peppers Sauce can be made in advance and reheated just before serving.

She suggests accompanying the quiche with a platter of Scottish smoked salmon and party pun-pernickel bread which requires no work at all other than selecting the finest smoked salmon you can find. Fill a basket with raisin scones you make at home or buy at a good local bakery or gourmet shop.

To complete the meal, add an orange compote made with peeled and sliced oranges, sugar and white wine (which needs to be made at least four hours in advance) and a basket filled with mixed grapes.

With a menu as simple as the one which Annelise Cohen designed, the host can really relax and spend time with guests. If you want to enhance the menu with an additional dessert, you may wish to ask one of the guests to bring something.

"Bringing a dessert is easier for a guest to bring to a party than an entree which requires more preparation," said Cohen.

In searching for appropriate, easy, do-ahead recipes, Cohen be-

lieves that you are only limited by your own imagination.

For example, if a recipe calls for a flavor that you don't like such as dill, substitute an herb that you do like such as basil. Recipes are guidelines to follow, and your substitutions will make it special.

"I always like to assemble a simple classic brunch menu with muffins, waffles or French toast especially during the holidays," said Greg Ervin, Executive chef at Sebastian's restaurant in Troy's Somerset Collection. After a busy season filled with lots of cooking and baking, it's OK for home cooks to take some shortcuts. "There are a few waffle and muffin mixes in the gourmet shops which are very good," said Ervin. He also recommends planning as many do-ahead dishes as possible.

"Especially during the holidays, try to incorporate some of the leftovers from the night before into a recipe such as chopping some of the ham and incorporating it into an omelet or quiche," he said.

When preparing waffles or pancakes, chef Ervin recommends mixing and refrigerating the batter for about 24 hours before grilling. He says they'll rise much better if you do.

Corn muffins with little bits of fresh, cooked bacon are currently a popular combination at the res-

taurant. For another variation, he suggests adding a few teaspoons of fruit preserves to a well sprayed muffin tin before adding the batter. When the muffins are flipped out of the tins they'll have a glistered fruit topping.

To insure that professional look, fill muffin tins to the rim with batter. "And always set the muffin tins in the center of the oven, to allow the heat to circulate," he added. For a little variation add a few chopped nuts, a little bran or some berries to your favorite basic recipe.

If you want to convert your favorite basic muffin recipe to a bran muffin recipe, the Kretschmer wheat germ folks recommend substituting 1/4 cup of wheat germ for 1/4 cup of all-purpose flour. Substitute 1/4 cup fat-free egg substitute or two egg whites for one whole egg, use skim milk and substitute low-fat or fat-free plain yogurt for sour cream.

To accompany the muffins or waffles, chef Ervin like to blend some pure maple syrup with softened cream cheese. "It's a great accompaniment and can be done the day before," he said. If you'll be blending this mixture with an electric mixer, use the flat beater, and not the whisk because it will easily become overwhipped.

Mike Thibault one of four partners at The Cook's Garden in Birmingham which opened in October, likes to create a brunch menu

that works equally well for a light luncheon.

One of his favorite dishes is a sandwich made on grilled homemade grain or semolina bread with smoked turkey or a smoked turkey Reuben.

"I like to recommend serving lots of fruits and vegetables to clients planning a brunch menu. I especially like to accompany vegetable trays with a dip made with a base of boursin cheese," said Thibault. Serving finger foods at brunch is also highly recommended because it gives guests lots of variety.

Currently, fingers of toasted bread dipped into a thin peanut butter coating and then rolled in toasted crumbs mixed with a few pieces of finely crumbled bacon are a popular item.

When setting up a buffet table, don't set out too much food at once. "As long as everything has been prepared in advance, it's best to keep refreshing the trays and chafing dishes periodically because much of it will dry out after a few hours," said Thibault.

No matter how you choose to celebrate the first day of the year whether you're cooking from scratch, incorporating a side dish or two to be made from a mix or allowing a professional caterer to create the entire meal, keep it simple and enjoy the day. See recipes inside.

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TARSAL TUNNEL SYNDROME

You may be familiar with the carpal tunnel syndrome. In this condition the nerve to the first three digits of the hand becomes compressed as the nerve passes through the wrist. The cause of this impairment is that the nerve courses in a confined space of the wrist - the carpal canal.

A similar feature exists in the ankle. The nerve to the bottom of the foot travels to that destination in company with three tendons that flex the toes and forefoot. The common path the nerve and tendons use are turned into a tight tunnel by a ligament at the back of the ankle. If one or more of the tendons becomes swollen, the nerve in turn is compressed.

What you feel is numbness on the bottom of the foot. Furthermore you begin to stumble when you walk. You don't sense the solid ground beneath you, and the feet lose their ability to spring forward to give you the momentum and swing that starts ambulation forward.

The numbness and tingling leads you to believe that the nerve is at fault, but most often inflamed tendons are the source of the problem. Relief usually requires treatment of tendon swelling either by injection or anti-inflammatory medication. If these approaches do not succeed, then just as in carpal tunnel syndrome, surgical intervention to relieve nerve compression, is in order.

Invite friends, family over for brunch

See related story on Taste front.

CRUSTLESS QUICHE WITH BRAZILIAN PEPPERS SAUCE

- 1 stick butter, melted (8 tablespoons)
- 8 slices egg bread or chiala, crusts removed
- 2 cups milk
- 4 eggs
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 pound soft cheese, grated (Havarti, Brie, or Camembert or a combination)
- 1 cup chopped red or green pepper

The day before: Heat oven to 350 degrees. Butter a casserole or 2-quart souffle dish. Brush butter on one side of the bread slices. Combine milk, eggs, salt and pepper and mix well.

Arrange half the bread in the casserole. Sprinkle with half the red pepper and cheese. Repeat. Pour milk-egg mixture slowly over the bread. Let stand for 15-20 minutes. Bake 15-20 minutes until the cheese is melted. Remove from oven, cool and refrigerate until the next day.

The next day: Heat oven to 350 degrees. Place quiche in oven and bake for 30 minutes or until the top has puffed and is golden.

BRAZILIAN PEPPERS SAUCE

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 large Spanish onion, peeled and sliced
- 1 sweet red pepper, cut into strips
- 1 green pepper, cut into strips
- 1 yellow pepper, cut into strips
- 2 large tomatoes, sliced
- 1/2 cup tomato sauce
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- Dash of Tabasco sauce

Heat olive oil in large saucepan. Add onion and cook for 3 minutes. Add peppers and cook 3 minutes more. Add tomatoes, tomato sauce and seasonings and cook for 15 minutes more, stirring every few minutes. Serve as a side sauce for the quiche. May be made up to 3 days in advance.

Party host pointers

It's every party-giver's biggest fear - running out of food or drink. But how do you estimate how much to serve, especially for a large party?

- Here are some pointers from Marjorie Reed-Gordon, a consultant to Stouffer Foods.
- Plan on 2 1/2 drinks per person.
- Allow for six to eight appetizers for each person.
- Figure a 6 to 8-ounce entree serving per guest.
- Serve fruit and two other dessert choices.
- Add a caterer's touch with garnishes of fruits, vegetables, evergreens, flowers or herbs.
- For a party of 20, you will need 35 wine glasses, 75 cocktail napkins, 32 dinner plates, 32 sets of silverware, 30 dinner napkins, 32 dessert plates, 30 coffee cups, and 30 dessert forks and teaspoons.

LARANJA MARQUESAS

- 8 oranges, peeled and sliced
 - 1 cup sugar
 - 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
 - 1 cup white wine
- Place sliced orange in a glass dish. Sprinkle sugar over the oranges. Heat white wine and vanilla and boil for 3 minutes. Pour the hot liquid over the oranges and let sit 4 hours or more.

GINGER ORANGE MUFFINS

- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup wheat germ, any flavor

- 1/2 cup firmly packed brown sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 2 teaspoons ground ginger
- 1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon allspice
- 1/2 teaspoon salt (optional)
- 1/2 cup finely chopped crystallized ginger, divided
- 1/4 cup orange juice
- 1/4 cup margarine, melted
- 2 egg whites, slightly beaten

Heat oven to 400 degrees. Line 12 medium muffin cups with paper

linking cups or spray bottoms only with no-stick cooking spray. Combine flour, wheat germ, brown sugar, baking powder, spices and salt. Stir in 1/4 cup crystallized ginger, reserving remainder. Add combined orange juice, margarine and egg whites; mix just until dry ingredients are moistened. Fill muffin cups 3/4 full. Sprinkle with remaining crystallized ginger and additional wheat germ, if desired. Bake 18 to 20 minutes or until golden brown. Recipe from Kretschmer wheat germ.

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