

Sensational Thanksgiving Sides

Written by Debbi Covington

Tuesday, 17 November 2015 14:49



I was determined to start out the Thanksgiving season on the right foot. For the first time in years, I decorated our home with pumpkins, fall leaves and orange pillows. I pulled out our fall dishware and put an autumn tablecloth on the dining room table.

On November 1st, Vince and I put our very few Halloween decorations in the attic and I unpacked the wooden praying hands that Vince's mother had given us and my Mama's turkey salt and pepper shakers. We were all set to observe the sometimes forgotten holiday that's between Halloween and Christmas. With my renewed Thanksgiving attitude, and on that fateful November 1st, Vince and I went out for a short shopping spree – honestly, just to look for fall clothing. As soon as we walked into TJ Maxx, it was all over. Christmas décor was too much to resist. Two full buggies later, the back of Vince's car looked like Santa Claus' bag had exploded. In my shame, our new Christmas decorations have been stowed in the attic until AFTER Thanksgiving.

Now, I'm back on track and looking forward to the last Thursday in November. My Thanksgiving memories were very happy ones! Mama was a fabulous hostess. She cooked for days preparing for our annual feast. My maternal grandmother, aunts, uncles and cousins from Southern Pines and Fayetteville, NC were the guests every year. My brother and I loved our Thanksgivings in Wilson, NC with our parents and relatives. These days, Vince and I celebrate the holiday with a bunch of our friends. Best of all, I don't have to cook! The hosts take care of the turkeys and hams. The guests are invited to bring side dishes and desserts. It's great! The recipes this week are perfect for sharing on a Thanksgiving buffet. The Vegetable Torte may seem complicated, but it's actually very simple – and it's gorgeous! Roasting the vegetables takes a bit of time but you're busy working on the next layer while each of the roasted veggies cook. I use olive oil cooking spray instead of actual olive oil to keep the dish from being greasy. Use just enough olive oil spray to keep the vegetables from sticking to the pan. You want to taste the yummy vegetables and the cheese, not the olive oil. The dish is best made the day

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before and reheated – also a plus! The Cauliflower Gratin is super easy and is a great substitution for macaroni and cheese. The Wine Cake is a new recipe. Easy and delicious, a dollop of freshly whipped cream will make it a new annual favorite. I hope you're surrounded by family and friends and seated at a bountiful table on November 26th. May your blessings be many and your troubles be few. Happy Thanksgiving!

Vegetable Torte (above)

1 red onion

2 tablespoons butter

2 sweet potatoes (approximately 1½ pounds)

Olive oil cooking spray

Salt and pepper

3 zucchini (approximately 1½ pounds)

3 yellow squash (approximately 1½ pounds)

12 ounces portobello mushrooms

1¼ cups grated Romano cheese, divided

Sensational Thanksgiving Sides

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2 cups chopped broccoli florets, uncooked

$\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon dried basil, divided

1 (10-ounce) package frozen leaf spinach, thawed and squeezed dry

1 (12-ounce) jar roasted red bell peppers, drained

2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese, divided

Slice red onion into thin slices. Heat butter in a medium saucepan. Cook onion until golden and caramelized. Remove from heat and cool. Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Peel sweet potatoes. Slice into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch slices. Place potatoes on a baking sheet. Spray potatoes lightly with olive oil cooking spray and season with salt and pepper. Roast in preheated oven for 10 minutes. Turn potato slices over and roast for 8 minutes more. Remove from oven and cool. While potatoes are roasting, slice zucchini and squash into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch slices. Place slices on a large baking sheet. Spray slices lightly with olive oil cooking spray and season with salt and pepper. Roast in preheated oven for 20 minutes. Remove from oven and cool. While the zucchini and squash are roasting, slice portobello mushrooms. Place mushroom slices on a baking sheet. Spray lightly with olive oil cooking spray and season with salt and pepper. Roast in preheated oven for 8 minutes. Remove from oven and cool. Spray a springform pan with olive oil cooking spray. Wrap bottom of pan in aluminum foil and place on a baking sheet so that you won't have any drips in your oven. Layer half of the sweet potatoes in the bottom of the pan, overlapping to cover completely. Sprinkle evenly with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup grated Romano cheese. Top with 2 cups chopped broccoli florets. Season with $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon dried basil. Add yellow squash, overlapping to cover completely. Sprinkle evenly with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup grated Romano cheese. Add caramelized onion and spinach, spreading evenly to make the next layer. Top with roasted red peppers, overlapping to cover completely. Top with 1 cup of shredded mozzarella cheese. Season with $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon dried basil. Add mushrooms to make the next layer. Sprinkle with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup grated Romano cheese. Add zucchini, overlapping to cover completely. Sprinkle with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup grated Romano cheese. Add remaining sweet potatoes to make the final vegetable layer. Press down firmly to help the layers stick together. Top with remaining 1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup grated Romano cheese and $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon dried basil. Cover with aluminum foil and bake in a preheated 425 degree oven for 30 minutes. Uncover and cook for 10 minutes more. Remove

Sensational Thanksgiving Sides

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from oven and cool in pan for 30 to 40 minutes before cutting. Serves 10 to 12.

Cauliflower Gratin



1 small head cauliflower

2 tablespoons butter

2 tablespoons all-purpose flour

1 cup milk

1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups grated sharp cheddar cheese

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup plain Greek yogurt

Sensational Thanksgiving Sides

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1 teaspoon dijon mustard

Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

2 tablespoons bread crumbs

Cut cauliflower into bite-sized florets, approximately 6 cups. Bring a pot of lightly salted water to a boil; add the cauliflower and cook until tender, about 8 minutes. Drain and set aside. Melt the butter in a saucepan over medium heat. Add the flour and stir constantly to make a roux. Pour the milk into the butter-flour mixture, whisking constantly until thickened. Remove the pan from the heat. Stir in the cheese, yogurt and mustard. Season with salt and pepper. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Spray a gratin dish with cooking spray. Place cauliflower florets in prepared dish. Spoon cheese sauce evenly over the cauliflower. Sprinkle with bread crumbs. Bake, uncovered, in preheated oven for 30 minutes. Serves 4 to 6.



Wine Cake

For the cake:

Sensational Thanksgiving Sides

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1 (15.25-ounce) box yellow cake mix

1 (3.4-ounce) package instant vanilla pudding

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup light brown sugar

2 teaspoons ground cinnamon

4 eggs

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup water

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup white wine

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup vegetable oil

For the glaze:

1 stick butter

Sensational Thanksgiving Sides

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Tuesday, 17 November 2015 14:49

1 cup sugar

¼ cup white wine

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour a bundt cake pan. In a large mixing bowl, combine cake mix with instant pudding mix, sugar, brown sugar, cinnamon, eggs, water, wine and vegetable oil. Pour batter into prepared pan. Bake for 60 minutes. After 50 minutes, combine butter, sugar and ¼ cup wine in a small sauce pan. Cook over medium heat and stir to combine until the sugar is melted. Remove from heat. Remove cake from oven and pour sugar mixture over the hot cake while cake is still in the pan. Cool for 30 to 40 minutes. Turn cake out onto a cake plate. Serves 10.



The writer owns Catering by Debbi Covington and is the author of two cookbooks, Gold Medal Winner of the Benjamin Franklin Award, Celebrate Everything! and Dining Under the Carolina Moon. Debbi's website address is www.cateringbydebbicovington.com. She may be reached at 525-0350 or by email at dbc@cateringbydebbicovington.com.