

Greek Dinner Party

Written by Debbi Covington
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My husband, Vince, and I love Greek food! When we travel we always look for authentic Greek restaurants, and when we entertain we often host Greek-themed dinner parties.



We like to begin our Greek-inspired evenings with Greek Tigers. If you have not yet tasted licorice-flavored ouzo, you must! It's available at your local liquor store. Roasted Red Pepper Hummus is a delicious and easy hors d'oeuvre. One of our all time favorite Greek dishes is Souvlaki. The classic shish kebab is prepared by marinating cubes of beef, lamb, or pork in a red wine vinegar and lemon juice marinade. Garlic and oregano give the flavor a boost along with a dose of salt and black pepper. The meat needs a few hours to marinate in the refrigerator, but the final grilling only takes about 10 minutes. Greek Tortellini Salad is the perfect accompaniment! Refrigerated tortellini is combined with diced tomatoes, cucumber, green onion, fresh parsley, black olives, pepperoncini peppers and Feta cheese and then tossed with a Greek vinaigrette. The grand finale, Walnut Baklava, is a traditional Greek pastry that's very simple to make. Preparation can be a bit time consuming but the end result is well worth the effort. I highly recommend this meal for a special evening with good friends. Opa!

Greek Tigers

1/2 cup ouzo

1-1/2 cups freshly squeezed orange juice

Squeeze of fresh lime juice

Put all ingredients with ice cubes in a martini shaker, shake and strain into double shot glasses. Serves 6 to 8.

Roasted Red Pepper Hummus

2 (15-ounce) cans chickpeas, rinsed and drained

3 garlic cloves

1 (6-ounce) jar roasted red bell peppers, drained

1/2 cup tahini

1/3 cup water

2 tablespoons olive oil

1-1/2 teaspoons salt

1/2 teaspoon ground cumin

1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper

1/3 cup fresh lime juice

Pita chips

Process all ingredients in a food processor until smooth, stopping to scrape down sides. Cover and chill until ready to serve. Serve with pita chips. Serves 6 to 8.

Souvlaki

1/4 cup vegetable oil

1/4 cup red wine vinegar

1/4 cup fresh lemon juice

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1 medium clove garlic, minced

4 pounds sirloin, lamb, or pork, cubed

Salt, pepper, and oregano, to taste

Combine all ingredients in a zip-top plastic bag. Seal and refrigerate for two to six hours.

Preheat grill. Place meat on skewers. Grill skewers for 10 minutes, turning several times.

Serves 6 to 8.

Greek Tortellini Salad

1 (9-ounce) package refrigerated cheese tortellini

5 Roma tomatoes

1 medium cucumber

1 (4-ounce) can sliced black olives, drained

1/4 cup sliced pepperoncini peppers, drained

1/2 cup bottled Greek vinaigrette

3 green onions, chopped

1/4 cup fresh chopped parsley

4 ounces Feta cheese crumbles

Cook tortellini according to package directions, drain well. Cut tomatoes into large chunks.

Remove seeds from cucumber and cut into large chunks. Combine all ingredients in a large glass bowl. Cover and refrigerate until well chilled. Serves 8 to 10.

Walnut Baklava

1 (16-ounce) package frozen phyllo dough

1-1/2 cups sugar

3/4 cup honey

1-1/2 cups water

1 teaspoon lemon juice

1 small cinnamon stick

4 cups (1 pound) walnuts

1/2 cup sugar

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg

2 cups butter, melted

Thaw frozen phyllo dough in refrigerator, according to package directions. Combine 1

1/2 cups sugar and next 4 ingredients in a saucepan and bring to a boil over medium

heat. Boil for 15 minutes, stirring frequently. Discard cinnamon stick and chill syrup

mixture in the refrigerator. Process walnuts in a food processor until finely ground.

Add 1/2 cup sugar, cinnamon, and nutmeg. Mix well. Brush a 9x13-inch baking dish

with melted butter. Reserve 4 sheets of phyllo dough for top of baklava. Layer 4 sheets

of phyllo in dish, brushing each sheet of dough with melted butter. Sprinkle with a

portion of the walnut mixture. Continue layering with 3 sheets of phyllo, brushing each

with melted butter and sprinkling third sheet with walnut mixture until all of the

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phyllo dough and walnut mixture are used. Top with reserved 4 sheets of phyllo dough, brushing each with melted butter. Cut into diamond-shaped pieces. Pour any remaining butter over top. Bake, uncovered, in a preheated 350 degree oven for 30 minutes. Lower heat to 325 degrees and bake for an additional 30 minutes. Pour chilled syrup evenly over hot pastry. Cool completely. Cut through diagonals again before serving. Serves 15 to 20.

The writer owns Catering by Debbi Covington and is the author of the cookbook, Dining Under the Carolina Moon. Debbi's website address is www.cateringbydebbicovington.com . She may be reached at 525-0350 or by email at covingtoncats@embarqmail.com.