

July and August in the Lowcountry can be so very sweltering that the thought of being trapped in a kitchen cooking dinner makes me consider skipping the meal all together!



Of course, Vince wouldn't go for that idea, so I've been coming up with simple and easy to prepare recipes that don't make the kitchen hot and that take advantage of our smaller appetites during the steamy summer months. This week's recipes are light and refreshing – and easy. All you need to add is a green salad and some fresh local fruits and vegetables. Hot weather dining can be satisfying and delicious. Hope you enjoy these recipes!

p.s. For the best produce in town, visit one of our local farmers' markets: Tuesdays – Pigeon Point; Fridays – Habersham and Saturdays – Port Royal.

Lettuce Tacos with Avocado Sauce

For the tacos:

- 1 pound ground chicken
- 1 tablespoon oil
- 1/2 cup bottled salsa
- 1/2 cup sliced green onions
- 1/3 cup shredded carrots
- Ground cumin, to taste
- 3/4 cup shredded Monterey jack cheese
- Sour cream
- Bottled salsa
- 1 medium head iceberg lettuce, washed, drained and separated into leaves

For the sauce:

- 1 avocado, cut into cubes
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 green onion, minced
- 2 small cloves garlic, minced
- 1/8-1/4 teaspoon salt, optional
- 2 tablespoons chopped cilantro

Heat oil in a heavy skillet. Add ground chicken. Saute, breaking up meat until no pink remains. Stir in salsa, green onion, carrots and cumin. Cook over medium heat until all liquid has cooked off. Sprinkle with cheese. Place on table with a bowl of lettuce leaves and a small bowl each of sour cream and extra bottled salsa. In a small bowl, mix together avocado, lemon juice, green onion, garlic, salt and cilantro. Each person spoons about 1/4 cup chicken mixture into a lettuce leaf. Dollop with sour cream, salsa and avocado sauce. Roll up and eat! Serves 4.

Curried Tuna Melts

1 (7-ounce) can tuna, drained and broken into chunks
1/4 cup chopped celery
2 tablespoons raisins
2 tablespoons sliced green onion
1/4 cup mayonnaise
2 tablespoons lemon juice
1/2 teaspoon curry powder
2 English muffins, split, lightly buttered
4 slices cheddar cheese

Combine tuna, celery, raisins and green onion in a small bowl. In a small bowl, stir together mayonnaise, lemon juice and curry. Fold into tuna mixture. Toast English muffins. Immediately spoon tuna mixture on muffins. Top each sandwich with a slice of cheese. Broil for 2 to 3 minutes or until cheese melts. Serve hot. Serves 4.

Baked Chicken Stuffed Tomatoes

4 very large tomatoes (about 2 pounds)
Salt
2 tablespoons butter
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 cup milk
1-3/4 cups diced roast chicken
1/2 cup finely chopped celery
1/4 cup sliced green onion
1/4 cup chopped salted cashews
1/2 cup shredded sharp white cheddar cheese, divided
Seasoned salt
Freshly ground black pepper

Cut a slice off top of each tomato and scoop out pulp. Sprinkle inside of tomatoes lightly with salt. Turn upside-down to drain. In a small saucepan, melt butter and blend in flour. Cook, stirring until bubbly. Off heat, stir in milk. Put back over low heat and cook, stirring until smooth and thickened. Stir in chicken, celery, onions, nuts and 1/4 cup cheese. Season to taste with seasoned salt and pepper. Fill tomato shells with the mixture. Arrange in a shallow baking dish or pie plate. Sprinkle with remaining 1/4 cup cheese. Bake at 350 degrees for 15-20 minutes or until golden brown on top. Serves 4.

Penne with Walnuts and Peppers

6 ounces penne pasta
1 tablespoon olive oil
1/3 cup walnuts, coarsely chopped
4 large garlic cloves, thinly sliced

- 1 medium red sweet pepper, seeded and cut lengthwise into bite-size strips
- 1 medium yellow sweet pepper, seeded and cut lengthwise into bite-size strips
- 1 small red onion, cut into thin wedges
- 1 cup halved grape tomatoes
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh Italian parsley
- 2 teaspoons chopped fresh rosemary
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons grated fresh Parmesan cheese

Cook pasta according to package directions. Drain and set aside. In a large skillet, heat oil over medium heat. Add walnuts and garlic. Cook for about minutes or until garlic is light brown, stirring frequently. Add sweet peppers and red onion. Cook for 5 to 7 minutes or until vegetables are crisp-tender, stirring frequently. Add tomatoes; cook and stir until heated through. Stir in parsley, rosemary, salt and black pepper. Place pasta in a large shallow bowl. Top with walnut-pepper mixture; toss gently to coat. Sprinkle with Parmesan cheese. Serves 4.

Chopped Vegetable Marinade

For the salad:

- 3 cups broccoli florets, roughly chopped
- 1 cucumber, peeled, seeded and coarsely chopped
- 3 tomatoes, seeded and coarsely chopped
- 1/2 cup coarsely chopped red onion
- 1/2 cup feta cheese crumbles

For the dressing:

- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 1/4 cup red wine vinegar
- 1/2 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper

In a salad bowl, combine all vegetables and cheese. Toss. In a small bowl, combine oil, vinegar, mustard, salt and pepper. Mix well. Pour dressing over vegetables. Toss to mix well. Cover. Chill 30-45 minutes, stirring occasionally. Serves 4.

Frozen Summer Salad

- 1 (3-ounce) package cream cheese, softened
- 3 tablespoons mayonnaise
- Dash salt
- 1 cup whipping cream, whipped
- 1/4 cup drained canned mandarin oranges
- 1/4 cup snipped pitted dates
- 1 (8-ounce) can crushed pineapple, drained
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped candied ginger

1/2 cup chopped almonds, toasted
Salad greens

Combine cream cheese, mayonnaise and salt. Fold in cream, oranges, dates, pineapple and ginger. Turn into an 8-inch square pan. Sprinkle with the almonds. Freeze for one hour or until firm. Let stand at room temperature for 10 minutes to soften before cutting into squares. Serve atop salad greens of your choice. Serves 6 to 8.

White Sangria

2 cups dry white wine
1 cup pineapple juice
1/4 cup brandy
1 tablespoon sugar
1/4 pineapple, cut into spears
1/2 orange, thinly sliced
1 lemon, thinly sliced
3/4 cup lemon-lime carbonated beverage, chilled

Combine wine, pineapple juice, brandy and sugar in a clear glass pitcher. Add fruit. Gently stir in carbonated beverage. Pour over ice cubes in tall glasses, dividing fruit evenly. Serves 8.

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 debbic@cateringbydebbicovington.com.