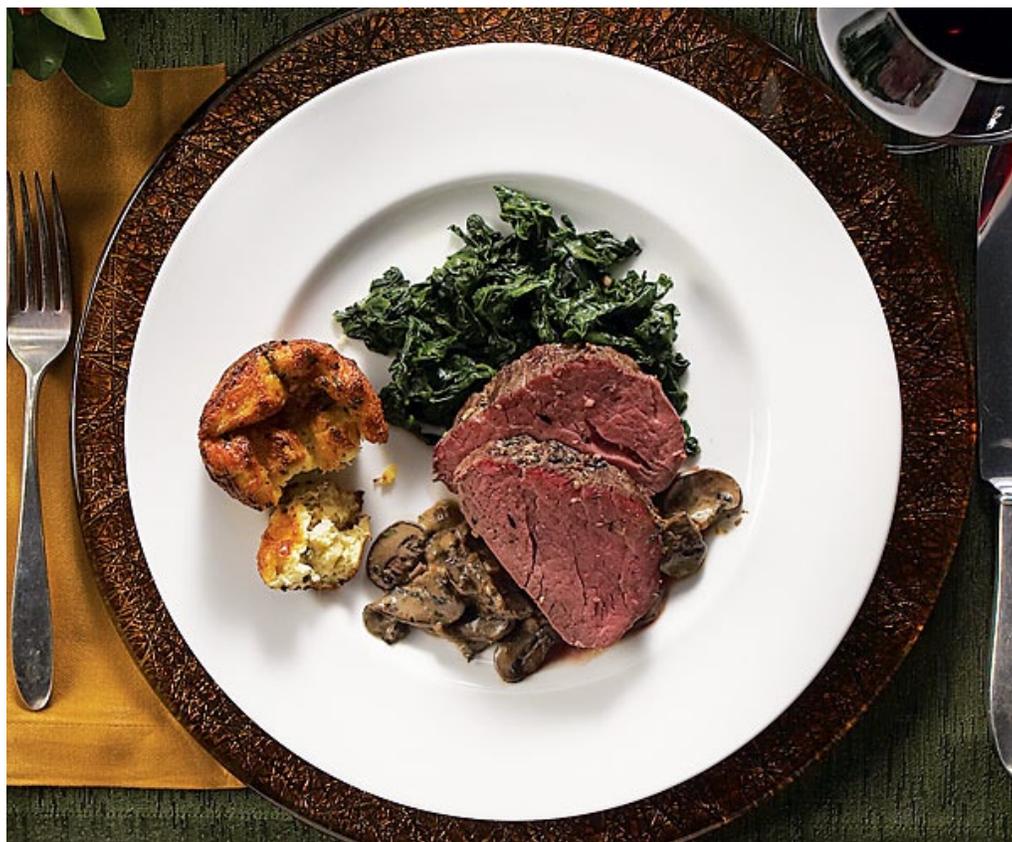


A Modern Christmas

by Susie Middleton

All the classics—roast beef and trifle included—get a fresh, new look in this festive holiday dinner



It's all fine and good to say you're not going to get caught up in the holiday madness this year. "No last-minute shopping," you swear. "Only one batch of cookies." And best of all, "I'll keep the meal simple." There's only one problem with this picture: You actually like to buy presents, bake cookies, and, well, cook. Instead, what about a holiday meal that's fun to make and impressive to serve? This menu for eight has all the classics you want for the ultimate Christmas dinner (including a juicy roast beef), updated with a stylish, modern flare. And never mind the 12 days of Christmas. We have an easy plan that gets you started three days ahead, so you have lots of time to do the cooking—and enjoy your eggnog, too.

the menu

Champagne Cosmo

Crab & Scallion Stuffed Shrimp

Slow-Roasted Beef Tenderloin with Double-Mushroom Ragoût

Individual Savory Horseradish Bread Puddings

Lemon-Thyme Spinach

Ginger Cake Trifles with Caramelized Apples, Cranberries & Whipped Cream



SHOPPING LIST

Fresh Produce

2-1/2 lb. bagged spinach or 5 lb. bunched spinach
 1 small head frisée lettuce
 20 oz. cremini (baby bella) mushrooms
 1 bunch scallions (at least 6)
 2 medium shallots
 1 bulb garlic
 1 small piece fresh ginger
 1 bunch fresh thyme
 1 bunch fresh parsley
 1 bunch fresh chives
 1-1/2 lb. Granny Smith apples (about 4 small)
 1-1/2 cups fresh (or frozen) cranberries
 2 lemons
 2 limes

Meat, Eggs & Dairy:

4-lb. beef tenderloin roast, preferably from the thicker end
 16 jumbo shrimp (16 to 20 per lb.)
 1/2 lb. backfin crabmeat
 3-3/4 cups heavy cream
 1 lb. unsalted butter
 7 large eggs
 2-1/2 oz. Parmigiano-Reggiano
 1/2 cup buttermilk

Other Groceries:

2 bottles (750 ml each) brut sparkling wine or Champagne
 1-1/2 cups cranberry juice cocktail
 1/2 cup Grand Marnier
 1/3 cup dry Marsala
 1 loaf white sandwich bread, such as Pepperidge Farm Original
 1 oz. dried porcini mushrooms (about 1 cup)
 1/2 cup unsulfured mild molasses
 1/4 cup prepared white horseradish
 2 Tbs. finely chopped crystallized ginger

Pantry Staples:

6-3/4 oz. (1-1/2 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
 3/4 cup granulated sugar
 1/2 cup pure maple syrup
 1/3 cup mayonnaise
 5 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
 1/4 cup packed dark brown sugar
 2 tsp. ground ginger
 1-1/4 tsp. ground cinnamon
 1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
 1/2 tsp. Dijon mustard
 1/2 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
 1/2 tsp. baking soda
 1/4 tsp. ground cloves
 1/4 tsp. table salt
 Sriracha hot sauce (or other Asian chile sauce)
 Kosher salt
 Black peppercorn



MENU TIMELINE

Three days ahead:

Do the shopping, including wine and Champagne.
 Buy the decorations and centerpiece.

Two days ahead:

Make the ragoût and lemon-thyme butter.
 Choose wine glasses, trifle glasses, and plates.
 Stem and wash the spinach.

One day ahead:

Stuff the shrimp
 Make and bake the bread puddings, if you're planning to reheat them.
 Make the cake and apple mixture for the trifles.
 Set the table and decorate the room

Christmas morning:

Assemble the bread puddings (if not already made).
 Trim the tenderloin, season, and refrigerate.

Two hours ahead:

Whip the cream and assemble the trifles.
 Wilt the spinach.

Ninety minutes ahead:

Put the beef in to roast.
 Prepare the juice mixture for the cocktail.
 Bake the bread puddings (if you have a second oven).

Twenty minutes ahead:

Remove the beef from the oven. Tent with foil, and let it rest.
 Remove the bread puddings from the oven.
 Finish the cocktails (and pour one for yourself!).
 Bake the shrimp.
 Reheat the ragoût and sides.

Wine pairings:

Consider beginning the meal with a sparkling rosé. The estate grown and bottled Catalanian Raventós i Blanc L'Hereu de Nit Reserva Rosé 2006 (\$16) has a delicate salmon hue, tiny bubbles, and the flavors of soft, ripe tart fruits. Then move on to another Spanish wine, this time a white with floral tones and deep body to pair with the rich beef and morel sauce, such as the Cellers Unió Roureda Llicorella Blanc 2005 (\$36) from the Priorat region.

Champagne Cosmo

by Susie Middleton

Sip this festive sparkler—a Champagne twist on a Cosmopolitan—before dinner or while you enjoy the first course.

Serves eight.

ingredients

1-1/2 cups cranberry juice cocktail, chilled
1/2 cup Grand Marnier
3 Tbs. fresh lime juice
8 thin strips of lime zest (from 2 limes), each about 1/4 inch wide and 3 inches long
2 bottles (750 ml) brut sparkling wine or Champagne, chilled

how to make

Combine the cranberry juice, Grand Marnier, and lime juice in a small pitcher and mix well. Hold a lime strip over a tall Champagne flute, twist or tie it into a single knot to release the essential oils, and drop the zest into the flute. Repeat with the remaining zest and seven more flutes. Divide the juice mixture equally among the flutes. Top each flute with the sparkling wine (depending on the size of your flutes, you may not need all of the wine). Serve immediately.



photo: Scott Phillips

Crab & Scallion Stuffed Shrimp

by Susie Middleton

For this recipe, avoid shrimp that's already been deveined; because it's been slit down the back, it can't be butterflied properly.

Serves eight.

ingredients

3-1/2 Tbs. unsalted butter; more for the baking sheet
1/3 cup thinly sliced scallions (white and light-green parts only;
from 5 to 6 scallions)
Kosher salt
1/2 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
Two drops Sriracha hot sauce (or other Asian chile sauce)
1/3 cup mayonnaise
2 Tbs. coarsely chopped fresh parsley, plus 20 whole leaves or
small sprigs
1-1/2 tsp. fresh lemon juice
1 tsp. finely grated lemon zest
1/2 tsp. Dijon mustard
Freshly ground black pepper
1/2 lb. backfin crabmeat, drained and picked over for shells
1-1/4 cups fine fresh breadcrumbs
16 jumbo shrimp (16 to 20 per lb.), butterflied
1 small head frisee lettuce, torn into bite-size pieces
1-1/2 tsp. extra-virgin olive oil

how to make

Make the stuffing:

In a small saucepan, melt 2 Tbs. of the butter over medium-low heat. Add the scallions and a pinch of salt and cook, stirring, until softened, 3 to 4 minutes (don't brown). Take the pan off the heat and stir in the Worcestershire sauce and hot sauce. Cool to room temperature.

In a medium bowl, combine the mayonnaise, 1 Tbs. of the chopped parsley, 1 tsp. of the lemon juice, the lemon zest, the mustard, 1/4 tsp. salt, and a few grinds of pepper. Stir in the cooled scallion mixture. Add the crab and mix gently but thoroughly.

In a 10-inch skillet, melt the remaining 1-1/2 Tbs. butter over medium heat. Add the breadcrumbs and cook, stirring, until light golden brown, about 4 minutes. Transfer to a medium bowl and mix in the remaining 1 Tbs. chopped parsley and 1/4 tsp. salt.

Stuff the shrimp:

Line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment and rub lightly with butter. Arrange the butterflied shrimp on the baking sheet. Using a spoon or your hands, mound a heaping tablespoon of the crab mixture onto each shrimp. Sprinkle and pat the breadcrumbs over the crab. (This will be messy; don't worry if there are crumbs on the baking sheet.) Flip the tail of each shrimp up and over the crab.

Bake the shrimp:

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 400°F. Bake until the shrimp are cooked through, the crabmeat is hot, and the crumbs are golden brown, 12 to 14 minutes. While the shrimp are in the oven, toss the frisee and the whole parsley leaves with the remaining 1/2 tsp. lemon juice, the olive oil, and a pinch of salt. On 8 small plates, arrange a small pile of the salad and two shrimp. Serve right away.



photo: Scott Phillips

TIP: You can butterfly the shrimp, make the stuffing and breadcrumb topping, and stuff the shrimp up to a day ahead. If stuffing ahead, don't top with the crumbs or flip up the tails until ready to bake. Cover and refrigerate the shrimp and stuffing; store the crumbs airtight at room temperature. Remove the stuffed shrimp from the fridge while the oven is heating.

Slow-Roasted Beef Tenderloin with Double-Mushroom Ragoût

by Susie Middleton

Roasting the beef at a low temperature cooks the meat slowly and evenly and gives you time to finish preparing the other dishes.

Serves eight.

ingredients

2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
2 tsp. coarsely chopped fresh thyme
2 tsp. minced garlic
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
4-lb. beef tenderloin roast, preferably from the thicker end, trimmed of silver skin and chain
1 recipe Double-Mushroom Ragoût (*see next recipe*)

how to make

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 250°F.

In a small bowl, combine the olive oil, thyme, garlic, 1 tsp. salt, and several generous grinds of black pepper. Put the tenderloin on a heavy-duty rimmed baking sheet or in a small roasting pan and rub the oil mixture all over it.

Roast the tenderloin until an instant-read thermometer inserted in the thickest part reads 130°F for medium rare, about 1 hour. Transfer to a carving board, tent with foil and let rest for at least 20 minutes before serving.

Cut the tenderloin crosswise into 1/2-inch slices. Serve with the ragoût.



photo: Scott Phillips

TIP: You can season the tenderloin up to 6 hours ahead and refrigerate.

Double-Mushroom Ragoût

by Susie Middleton

Yields 2 to 2-1/2 cups.

ingredients

1 oz. dried porcini mushrooms (about 1 cup)
3 Tbs. unsalted butter
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
20 oz. cremini (baby bella) mushrooms, sliced 1/4 inch thick
Kosher salt
1/3 cup finely chopped shallot
1/3 cup dry Marsala
1 Tbs. coarsely chopped fresh thyme
3/4 cup heavy cream; more for reheating
Freshly ground black pepper
2 Tbs. chopped fresh parsley

how to make

Soak the porcini in 1-1/2 cups very hot water, stirring occasionally, until they're rehydrated, about 20 minutes. With a slotted spoon, transfer them to a cutting board and chop coarsely. Strain the soaking liquid through a coffee filter into a small bowl and set aside.

In a 10-inch straight-sided saute pan, heat 2 Tbs. of the butter with the olive oil over medium heat. Add the cremini and 1 tsp. salt and cook, stirring occasionally, until the mushrooms have softened and released their liquid, 5 to 8 minutes. Increase the heat to medium high and cook, stirring more frequently, until the mushrooms are shrunken and very well browned, 8 to 10 minutes more.

Reduce the heat to medium, add the shallots and the remaining 1 Tbs. butter and cook, stirring, until the shallots are softened, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the Marsala, thyme, porcini, and 1/4 cup porcini-soaking liquid (reserve the remaining soaking liquid if making ahead). Cook and stir until most of the liquid evaporates, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the cream and cook until reduced to a saucy consistency, 1 to 2 minutes. Stir in the parsley and season to taste with salt and pepper.



photo: Scott Phillips

TIP: You can make and refrigerate the ragoût up to 2 days ahead. Just before serving, reheat it in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Stir in 1 or 2 Tbs. of the reserved mushroom-soaking liquid and 1 or 2 Tbs. heavy cream, letting both reduce slightly until the ragoût is just loose and saucy enough to spoon around the tenderloin. Stir in the parsley.

Individual Savory Horseradish Bread Puddings

by Susie Middleton

For this menu, you will need only 8 puddings, but you'll have 4 extra for anyone who wants seconds.

Yields 12 individual puddings.

ingredients

2 tsp. unsalted butter, softened
1-1/4 cups heavy cream
6 large eggs, at room temperature
1/4 cup prepared white horseradish
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
3 cups small-diced white sandwich bread, such as Pepperidge Farm Original (about 5 slices), with crusts
1 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
3 Tbs. thinly sliced fresh chives

how to make

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 400°F. Grease a 12-cup nonstick muffin tin with the butter.

In a 4-cup liquid measuring cup, thoroughly whisk the cream and eggs. Whisk in the horseradish, 1 tsp. salt, and a few grinds of pepper and set aside.

Portion half of the bread cubes evenly among the 12 muffin cups. Portion half of the parmigiano and half of the chives evenly among the cups. Repeat with the remaining bread, cheese, and chives.

Whisk the custard again and carefully pour it into the muffin cups, distributing it evenly. Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes.

Bake until the puddings are set and the tops are nicely browned and puffed, 18 to 22 minutes. Let cool in the pan for 20 minutes. Carefully remove the puddings from the pan, running a paring knife around the edge of the puddings if they stick.



photo: Scott Phillips

TIP: The puddings can be assembled and refrigerated up to 6 hours before baking. They can also be baked a day ahead, refrigerated, and reheated, wrapped in foil, in a low oven.

Lemon-Thyme Spinach

by Nancy Oakes

A generous amount of lemon zest adds a touch of brightness to sautéed spinach.

Serves eight.

ingredients

6 Tbs. unsalted butter, softened
4 tsp. coarsely chopped fresh thyme
2 tsp. lightly packed finely grated lemon zest
1/2 tsp. minced garlic
Kosher salt
2 lb. stemmed spinach (from 2-1/2 lb. bagged spinach or 5 lb. bunched spinach)

how to make

In a small bowl, combine the butter, thyme, lemon zest, garlic, and a generous pinch of salt and mash with a fork or spoon until well blended.

Put several large handfuls of the spinach in a 12-inch nonstick stir-fry or sauté pan. Season with 1/2 tsp. salt. Turn the heat to medium high and cook, stirring frequently, until the spinach is mostly wilted, 1 to 2 minutes. Add another few handfuls of spinach and another 1/2 tsp. salt, and continue to cook, tossing, until wilted. Repeat until all of the spinach is wilted. Turn off the heat, but leave the pan on the burner. Add the butter mixture and toss just until it melts and coats the spinach. Season to taste with salt and serve immediately.



photo: Scott Phillips

TIP: You can make the butter mixture up to 2 days ahead (cover and refrigerate), and you can wilt the spinach up to 2 hours before dinner. Reheat it gently with the butter before serving.

Ginger Cake Trifles with Caramelized Apples, Cranberries & Whipped Cream

by Susie Middleton

While these trifles are delicious made with warm gingerbread and warm apples, they are equally good made a few hours ahead and chilled, which makes serving dessert a snap.

Serves eight.

ingredients

For the Apples and Cranberries

3 Tbs. unsalted butter

1-1/2 lb. Granny Smith apples (about 4 small), peeled and cut into large dice

Kosher salt

1-1/2 cups fresh (or frozen) cranberries

1/2 cup pure maple syrup

1/4 tsp. ground cinnamon

2 Tbs. finely chopped crystallized ginger

For the Whipped Cream

1-1/2 cups heavy cream, chilled

1 tsp. pure vanilla extract

2 Tbs. granulated sugar

1 recipe Ginger Cake (*see next recipe*)

how to make

Cook the apples and cranberries:

In a 10-inch straight-sided skillet, melt the butter over medium-high heat. Add the apples and 1/4 tsp. salt and cook, stirring occasionally at first and then more frequently, until the apples are nicely browned and tender, about 10 minutes. Add 3 Tbs. water to the pan, remove it from the heat, and stir to incorporate some of the brown bits from the bottom of the pan.

Add half of the cranberries, the maple syrup, cinnamon, a pinch of salt, and 2 Tbs. water. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, lower the heat to medium low, and simmer until the syrup has thickened a little and most of the cranberries have popped, about 2 minutes. Add the other half of the cranberries and simmer until about half of the new cranberries have popped, 2 to 3 minutes more. Take the pan off the heat and stir in the ginger. Let cool to room temperature.

Make the whipped cream:

Using a chilled bowl and beaters, whip the heavy cream and vanilla with a hand-held or stand mixer on medium speed until it begins to thicken, about 1 minute. Slowly sprinkle in the sugar and continue whipping until soft peaks form, another 1 to 2 minutes. Refrigerate if not using right away.

Assemble:

Using a serrated knife, cut the ginger cake into 3/4-inch cubes. Portion about half of the cake among eight 10-ounce glasses. Portion about half of the whipped cream among the glasses, spooning it over and around the cake, and top with about half of the apple mixture. Repeat with another layer of cake, whipped cream, and apples. (You may have some leftover cake.)



photo: Scott Phillips

TIP: The apple mixture can be made a day ahead and refrigerated (return it to room temperature before using). The cream can be whipped an hour before using. The trifles can be assembled and refrigerated up to 2 hours ahead.

Ginger Cake

by Susie Middleton

This cake is very much like a traditional gingerbread, except that it's made with buttermilk and is extra tender and moist.

Serves eight.

Yields one 8x8-inch cake.

TIP: The cake can be made a day ahead and stored at room temperature.

ingredients

4 oz. (1/2 cup) unsalted butter, at room temperature; more for the pan
6-3/4 oz. (1-1/2 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
2 tsp. ground ginger
1 tsp. ground cinnamon
1/2 tsp. baking soda
1/4 tsp. ground cloves
1/4 tsp. table salt
1 Tbs. minced fresh ginger
1/4 cup granulated sugar
1/4 cup packed dark brown sugar
1 large egg, at room temperature
1/2 cup unsulfured mild molasses
1/2 cup buttermilk, at room temperature

how to make

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Butter the sides of an 8x8-inch square cake pan and line the bottom of the pan with parchment. In a medium bowl, mix the flour, ground ginger, cinnamon, baking soda, cloves, and salt. Set aside.

Using a hand mixer or a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat the butter on medium speed until light and fluffy, about 1 minute. Add the fresh ginger and mix until just combined. Add both sugars and beat on medium speed until well combined and fluffy, about 1 minute. Stop the mixer and scrape down the sides of the bowl. Add the egg and mix on medium speed until well combined. Turn the mixer to low and slowly add the molasses. Add about one-third of the dry ingredients and mix until just combined. Add one-third of the buttermilk and mix until just combined. Add the remaining dry and wet ingredients in four more additions, finishing with the buttermilk and mixing until just combined after each addition. Scrape the batter into the cake pan and spread it evenly.

Bake the cake until a skewer inserted into the center comes out clean, 30 to 35 minutes. Let the cake cool completely in the pan, at least an hour.