

Appetizing Appetizers - 4th of July Spread

(Trying to appease a variety of palates? Skip the classic BBQ and serve appetizers. There will be something for everyone!)

From Mel's Kitchen Cafe

www.melskitchencafe.com

	Shrimp Cocktail	Saucy Meatballs	Brazilian Cheese Bread {Pao de Queijo}	Amazing Shrapnel Dip and Chips	Little Quinoa Patties	Sweet Berry Bruschetta	Brownie Batter Truffles
24 Hours in Advance	Prepare the shrimp and cocktail sauce according to recipe and refrigerate until ready to serve.	Prepare the meatballs through step #2 of the recipe, let cool, and refrigerate.		Prepare and refrigerate the dip (minus the avocados)			Prepare the Truffles and refrigerate.
12 Hours in Advance			Make Pao de Queijo batter and refrigerate.				
2 Hours Before Serving		Put the meatballs and sauce in crockpot and cook on high until ready to serve.			Prepare and cook the patties. These can be served at room temperature.	Prepare the Bruschetta and refrigerate until ready to serve.	
1 Hour Before Serving			Prepare and bake the Pao de Queijo (give the batter a good stir before pouring into the muffin tins). (Best served warm).	Dice up the avocados and gently stir into the dip. Serve with chips of choice.			

The Recipes

Shrimp Cocktail

INGREDIENTS

Shrimp:

- 2 pounds deveined, shell-on jumbo shrimp (16 to 20 per pound)
- 2 1/2 tablespoons salt
- 10 sprigs fresh thyme
- 2 teaspoons peppercorns
- 3 bay leaves
- 1/2 teaspoon celery seed
- 8 (2-inch) strips lemon peel plus 1/4 cup juice, from 2 lemons (reserve the lemon halves that have been juiced)
- 8 cups ice

Cocktail Sauce:

- 1 cup ketchup
- 1/4 cup prepared horseradish
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- 1/2 teaspoon Old Bay seasoning
- 1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper

DIRECTIONS

1. Combine the shrimp, 4 cups cold water, salt, thyme, peppercorns, bay leaves and celery seeds in a large pot. Cook the mixture over medium-high heat, stirring every so often, until the water registers 170 degrees and the shrimp are just beginning to turn pink, 5 to 7 minutes.
2. Remove the pot from the heat and add the lemon peels, juice and lemon halves that have already been juiced. Cover the pot and let the mixture sit until the shrimp are completely pink and firm, 5 to 7 minutes. Stir the ice into the pot and let the shrimp cool completely, about 5 minutes. Drain the water and peel the shrimp, leaving the tails intact. Refrigerate the shrimp up to 24 hours until ready to serve.
3. For the cocktail sauce, whisk all the ingredients together until combined. Store in the refrigerator until ready to serve with the shrimp.

Saucy Meatballs

INGREDIENTS

Meatballs:

- 1 1/2 pounds ground beef or lean ground turkey
- 3/4 cup quick oats
- 1 cup milk
- 3 tablespoons finely minced onion
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 cup all-purpose flour (for coating meatballs)
- Canola oil

Sauce:

- 12 oz. jar of cocktail sauce
- 1 can whole cranberry sauce
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1 cup water

DIRECTIONS

1. For the meatballs: preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Combine all the meatball ingredients (except the oil and flour). Roll into medium-small balls (about the size of a ping pong ball – if you want specifics) and place on a cookie sheet. Place sheet in the freezer for five minutes.
2. After 5 minutes, remove meatballs from freezer and immediately dredge in unseasoned flour. Heat 1/3 cup canola oil in a large skillet. When oil is hot, add meatballs and brown on all sides (but don't cook through). Place the meatballs in a single layer in a 9X13-inch baking dish and make the sauce.
3. For the sauce: combine the sauce ingredients in a medium saucepan and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Pour the sauce over the meatballs and cook in the oven for 40 minutes, tossing halfway through to coat the meatballs in the sauce. Serve with toothpicks.

Alternately, you can make the meatballs the day beforehand (including cooking them by themselves in the 9X13-inch pan) and then the next day, place the meatballs and heated sauce in the crockpot and cook on high for 2-3 hours to heat through.

Brazilian Cheese Bread {Pao de Queijo}

Note: You can experiment with many different cheeses in this recipe. My favorite combo is Parmesan and queso fresco (a widely available Mexican cheese). The texture will change if you use softer cheeses like cheddar or Monterey Jack. My recommendation if it's your first time making is to use all Parmesan cheese and then experiment after that. Don't substitute pregrated Parmesan in the green can or even the preshredded Parmesan in the bags or tubs (I tried that and the flavor was artificial and plasticky tasting). Freshly grated from a block is the way to go.

Also, in case you are wondering, there isn't a good substitution for the tapioca flour (same thing as tapioca starch). We make these often enough that I go through bags and bags of the stuff (I buy it on Amazon - the Bob's Red Mill brand - or it is usually widely available in most grocery stores these days).

INGREDIENTS

- 1 large egg
- 1/4 cup canola or vegetable or olive oil
- 2/3 cup milk
- 1 1/2 cups tapioca flour (fluff the flour before measuring)
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup packed shredded cheese, like Parmesan or Asiago (see note)

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. Lightly grease a mini muffin tin (this makes about 16-24 little breads so if you don't have a muffin tin large enough, you can just make separate batches after the first ones come out).
2. In a blender, combine the egg, oil, milk, flour and salt. Process until the mixture is smooth, scraping down the sides of the blender once or twice. Add the cheese and process for just a short bit, 5-10 seconds or a few short pulses, until the cheese is in small bits all throughout the batter.
3. Give the batter a good stir to get any solids off the bottom and pour the mixture into the prepared muffin tin filling the cups nearly to the top.
4. Bake the pao de queijo until very lightly golden brown, 15-20 minutes. Don't let them get too brown on the bottom or they will be too crusty and not as chewy.
5. Remove them from the oven and let them cool for just a minute or two. They are best eaten warm! Don't worry if the cute little puffs fall a bit in the middle - that's completely normal.

Amazing Shrapnel Dip

Note: Good quality canned corn is key here! I've found the Green Giant blend of white and yellow corn kernels are crisp and sweet and delicious. All canned corn is not created equal. The same goes with Italian dressing. I used Kraft Zesty, based on my cousin's recommendation. It was tasty but ultimately, use a dressing you like to eat normally because the taste will come through. You can see by the ingredient list that the quantities are really adaptable based on your preferences. The key is to chop everything up in to small, bite-sized pieces so none of the ingredients overwhelm the others. Finally, if you want to take this dip to a other-worldly level, try adding cooked, chopped shrimp. Unreal.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 can white beans, such as navy or Great Northern
- 1 can black beans
- 1 can corn (see note above)
- 1-2 avocados, diced
- 1/4-1/2 cup red pepper, diced
- 1-2 Roma tomatoes, diced
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped red onion
- 2-3 tablespoons finely chopped cilantro
- 1/3 cup Italian dressing (see note above), plus more if needed
- Squeeze of fresh lime (about 1/2 tablespoon or so from half of a large lime)
- Salt and pepper to taste
- White, blue or yellow corn/tortilla chips for serving

DIRECTIONS

1. Drain the beans and corn together in a colander. Give them a quick rinse and let them drain really well so no extra liquid makes its way into the dip. You can use a salad spinner to get rid of excess liquid or lay them out on a double layer of paper towels and blot dry. Add them to a large bowl.
2. Toss in the avocados, red pepper, tomatoes, red onion and cilantro. Mix. Pour the dressing over the top of the salad and using a large spoon or spatula, fold the ingredients and dressing together until everything is evenly coated.
3. Squeeze the lime juice over the top. Gently mix. Add salt and pepper to taste. Serve immediately with chips. Store leftovers in the refrigerator. If making in advance, wait to chop and stir in the avocados until right before serving.

[Little Quinoa Patties](#)

Note: I like to cook my quinoa in low-sodium chicken or vegetable broth. It adds more flavor. If you choose to cook the quinoa in water, you might need to add a bit more salt to compensate. Also, don't forget to rinse the quinoa before cooking - it makes a huge difference! Also, you can probably tell that this recipe is extremely adaptable. Quinoa works well with nearly any flavor, so feel free to change things around, up the spices, add onions, peppers, different kind(s) of cheese. Really, the sky's the limit here.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 1/2 cups cooked quinoa, room temperature
- 4 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/4 cup chopped flat leaf parsley
- 1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 cloves garlic, finely minced
- 1 cup finely crushed saltine or Ritz crackers or bread crumbs, plus more if needed
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

DIRECTIONS

1. Combine the quinoa, eggs, salt and pepper in a medium bowl. Stir in the parsley, cheese and garlic. Add the cracker or bread crumbs. Stir the mixture until combined. If the mixture seems overly wet, add a tablespoon or two more of cracker or bread crumbs. If it seems too dry, add a tablespoon or two of water or broth. Let it stand for about five minutes so the liquid can be somewhat absorbed. Take small handfuls of the mixture and form into little patties, about 1-inch thick, yielding about 11 or 12 patties.
2. In a large, nonstick skillet, heat the tablespoon olive oil over medium heat until it is hot. Add a single layer of patties (about half of them if you are using a 12-inch skillet) and cook until the bottoms are well-browned, about 5-7 minutes, adjusting the heat as necessary to prevent burning (or increase heat if the patties aren't browning well). Flip the patties and cook about 5 minutes more until the second side is golden brown. Remove from the skillet and repeat with the remaining patties (adding a bit more olive oil, if needed). Serve warm or at room temperature.

[Sweet Berry Bruschetta](#)

INGREDIENTS

- 1 12- to 14-inch long crusty baguette, sliced 1/4- to 1/2-inch thick
- Butter
- Cinnamon and sugar
- 8 ounces light cream cheese, softened to room temperature
- Zest of 1/2 lemon (about 1/2 teaspoon)
- 2 tablespoons powdered sugar
- 1/4 cup vanilla Greek yogurt
- Berries for topping (pomegranate seeds, raspberries, blueberries, blackberries, strawberries)
- Fresh mint for garnish, if desired

DIRECTIONS

1. Lightly butter one side of each baguette slice and place butter side up on a baking sheet. Sprinkle with cinnamon and sugar. Toast the bread slices under the oven broiler until golden brown (but not burned - watch closely!). It should only take 1-2 minutes to toast perfectly. Remove from oven and let the bread slices cool completely.
2. In a small bowl, combine the cream cheese, lemon zest, powdered sugar and yogurt and whisk to combine well.
3. Spread a tablespoon or so of the sweet cream cheese mixture on each toasted bread slice. Top with berries of your choice and fresh mint, if desired. Refrigerate until ready to serve (up to 2 hours - after that the bread slices may get a little soft).

Brownie Batter Truffles

INGREDIENTS

- 3/4 cup unsweetened cocoa powder, Dutch-process or regular
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup packed light brown sugar
- pinch salt
- 3/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 1/2 sticks (12 tablespoons) butter, melted
- 8-12 ounces chocolate or chocolate bark (candy coating)
- Sprinkles for garnish

DIRECTIONS

1. In a large bowl, combine the cocoa powder, granulated sugar, brown sugar, salt and flour until it is well combined. Stir in the vanilla and melted butter until the mixture forms a thick batter.
2. Line a large rimmed baking sheet with waxed or parchment paper. Roll the dough into about 3/4-inch size balls and place them on the wax paper. Refrigerate for about an hour until the brownie batter balls are firm.
3. Prepare another large baking sheet lined with parchment or wax paper. Melt the chocolate or candy coating according to package directions (I usually melt either in a microwave-safe bowl at 1-minute increments at 50% power, stirring in between, until melted). Using two forks, plop a truffle into the melted chocolate, submerging it completely. Lift it out with one of the forks and tap the handle of the fork lightly on the edge of the bowl to let the excess chocolate fall through the tines of the fork. Gently lay the fork on the empty baking sheet lined with wax or parchment paper and use the second fork to carefully nudge the truffle off the other fork onto the paper. Repeat with the remaining truffles. Use sprinkles on top of the truffles before the chocolate sets. Refrigerate until ready to serve.