

Foolproof 4th of July Menu
(A classic, foolproof & delicious BBQ spread)
From Mel's Kitchen Cafe
www.melskitchencafe.com

All the recipes have been modified to feed groups of about 10. Keep in mind, this is just an average number. You'll want to adjust the recipes accordingly if you are feeding more than that or if the 10-ish people are big eaters/little eaters.

Foolproof 4th of July Menu

	Classic Grilled Burgers	Loaded Baked Potato Salad	Boston Baked Beans	Summer Corn Salad	Festive Fruited Cheesecake Flag
1-2 Days in Advance		Bake the potatoes, cool, and chill in fridge.			
24 Hours in Advance	Form the beef into patties (according to recipe) and refrigerate the patties between sheets of wax or parchment paper until ready to grill.			Bring a large pot of water to a boil. When boiling, add one tablespoon sugar and one tablespoon vinegar. Add the cobs of corn to the pot of water and bring to a rolling boil. Cover the pot, remove from the heat and let the corn sit for 10 minutes. Remove the corn from the pot. When the corn is cool, cut the kernels off the cob, cutting close to the cob. Refrigerate the corn kernels.	Bake and cool the cheesecake. Store well-covered in the fridge.
12 Hours in Advance		Prepare the potato salad and refrigerate until ready to serve.	In a large Dutch oven or pot, bring 3 quarts water, beans and baking soda to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium-high and simmer vigorously for 20 minutes. Set beans aside until ready to prepare.		
2 Hours Before Serving	Cut up all of the burger garnishes and refrigerate on a serving platter. (Tomatoes, lettuce, pickles, cheese, etc.)		Heat the pot over medium heat and add the chopped bacon, stirring occasionally, until browned, about 6-8 minutes. Add the onion and cook until the onion is softened and translucent, about 5 minutes. Drain off bacon grease, if desired. Stir in the rest of the ingredients and bring the mixture to a boil. Cover, transfer to the oven and cook until the beans are tender, about 1 1/2 hours.	Toss the kernels in a medium bowl with the red onions, tomatoes, vinegar, olive oil, salt, and pepper.	Run a sharp knife along short sides of sheet, and use the parchment overhangs to lift out the cheesecake. Run the knife under hot water and dry well. Use it to cut the cheesecake into 48 squares, wiping the knife clean between cuts.
1 Hour Before Serving	Cook the burgers on a preheated grill over medium-high heat until the burgers are cooked to your liking. The last two minutes of grilling, butter the inside of the bun and slap it on the grill to toast while the burgers finish cooking.		Remove the lid and continue to bake the beans until they are completely tender, about 30 minutes. Stir in the remaining 1 tablespoon molasses and remaining 1 teaspoon mustard. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve.	Just before serving, toss in the fresh basil.	Add the fruit and the confectioners sugar to the cheesecake flag. (Refer to step 7 in the recipe).

The Recipes

Classic Grilled Burgers

INGREDIENTS

- 4 pounds ground beef (preferably not extra lean)
- 4 teaspoons seasoned salt
- 4 tablespoons A-1 sauce
- 2 teaspoons freshly ground black pepper
- 1/2 cup room temperature water

DIRECTIONS

1. In a medium bowl, mix all the ingredients together until well combined. Form the beef into patties about 1/2-inch thick and about 1/4-inch larger in diameter than the buns you'll be using. Refrigerate the patties until ready to grill.
2. Cook the burgers on a preheated grill over medium-high heat until the burgers are cooked to your liking (I like mine with the barest hint of pink in the center and usually grill for about 6 minutes per side). The last two minutes of grilling, butter the inside of the bun and slap it on the grill to toast while the burgers finish cooking.

Blue Cheese Burger Variation: After the beef and other ingredients have been mixed, add in about 2 ounces of crumbled blue cheese. Mix gently to combine and then form into patties.

Rosemary Burger Variation: Add 3-4 sprigs fresh rosemary (slide the leaves off the stalk, discard the stalk and coarsely chop the rosemary) to the ingredients and mix to combine with the beef.

Loaded Baked Potato Salad

INGREDIENTS

- 9-10 large russet potatoes, baked, cooled and chilled
- 1 1/2 cup light mayonnaise
- 1 cup light sour cream
- 8 tablespoons lowfat buttermilk
- 1 teaspoon celery seeds
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 12 ounces cheddar cheese, cubed small
- 8 green onions, thinly sliced
- 20 slices bacon, cooked and diced

DIRECTIONS

1. Slice the chilled, baked potatoes into about 1/2-inch slices, discarding any of the peels that fall off the potato (I left the peels that remained intact). Place the potatoes in a large bowl. In a small bowl, stir together the mayonnaise, sour cream and buttermilk. Add the celery seeds, black pepper and salt. Mix. Pour the mixture over the potatoes and gently mix to combine. Some of the potatoes will lightly break into pieces, which is ok. Try to avoid mixing so heavily that the potatoes turn into mush.
2. Add the cheese, green onions and bacon. Again, mix gently to combine. Cover the salad and refrigerate until ready to serve. Garnish with additional green onions, if desired.

Boston Baked Beans

(Consider doubling the recipe if your crowd has 6+ people)

Note: Because liquid evaporates faster in the oven in heavy cast-iron Dutch ovens than in lighter pots, add an additional 1 1/2 cups water before cooking the beans in the oven if you are using a cast-iron Dutch oven

INGREDIENTS

- 1 pound dried navy beans, about 2 cups, picked over and rinsed
- 1 tablespoon baking soda
- 6 ounces bacon, chopped
- 1 yellow onion, chopped fine
- 3 cups water
- 4 tablespoons packed dark brown sugar
- 1/4 cup plus 1 tablespoon molasses
- 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1 teaspoon cider vinegar

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F, positioning an oven rack in the center. In a large Dutch oven or pot, bring 3 quarts water, beans and baking soda to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium-high and simmer vigorously for 20 minutes. Drain the beans in a colander. Rinse the beans and set aside. Rinse the pot and return it to the stovetop.
2. Heat the pot over medium heat and add the chopped bacon, stirring occasionally, until browned, about 6-8 minutes. Add the onion and cook until the onion is softened and translucent, about 5 minutes. Drain off bacon grease, if desired. Stir in the 3 cups water (use 4 1/2 cups if using a heavy cast-iron pot), rinsed beans, sugar, 1/4 cup molasses, Worcestershire, 1 tablespoon mustard, vinegar, 1 teaspoon salt and 1/4 teaspoon pepper and bring the mixture to a boil. Cover, transfer to the oven and cook until the beans are tender, about 1 1/2 hours.
3. Remove the lid and continue to bake the beans until they are completely tender, about 30 minutes. Stir in the remaining 1 tablespoon molasses and remaining 1 teaspoon mustard. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve.

Summer Corn Salad

Note: To julienne the fresh basil, stack 4-5 basil leaves on top of each other and roll them up to make a long tube of basil. Slice every 1/8-inch down the length of the basil roll and as the basil unfurls, it will be sliced into thin long strips. The corn could also be grilled to turn this simple salad into a grilled version. This salad is very adaptable – you can increase the corn, add a few cloves of finely minced garlic, flat leaf parsley, and/or julienned baby spinach (in place of the basil). Go crazy!

INGREDIENTS

- 12 ears of corn, shucked
- 1 cup finely diced red onion
- 2 cups cherry tomatoes, sliced in half
- 6 tablespoons cider or red wine vinegar
- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 cup julienned fresh basil leaves

DIRECTIONS

1. Bring a large pot of water to a boil. When boiling, add one tablespoon sugar and one tablespoon vinegar. Add the cobs of corn to the pot of water and bring to a rolling boil. Cover the pot, remove from the heat and let the corn sit for 10 minutes. Remove the corn from the pot. When the corn is cool, cut the kernels off the cob, cutting close to the cob.
2. Toss the kernels in a medium bowl with the red onions, tomatoes, vinegar, olive oil, salt, and pepper. Just before serving, toss in the fresh basil. Add additional salt and pepper to taste, if desired. Serve cold or at room temperature.

Festive Fruited Cheesecake Flag

Note: For truly white stripes, cover alternating rows with just confectioners' sugar rather than lightly dusted strawberries. Also, the cheesecake (without being topped with fruit) can be made up to a day in advance and kept well-covered in the refrigerator.

INGREDIENTS

- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 3/4 teaspoons salt
- 12 ounces (3 sticks) butter, softened
- 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons light-brown sugar
- 4 (8-ounce) packages cream cheese, room temperature
- 1 1/2 cups granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon finely grated lemon zest
- 1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 4 large eggs, room temperature
- 8-9 ounces (1-2 cups) blueberries
- 1 pound strawberries, hulled and sliced lengthwise into thirds
- 12 ounces (3 cups) raspberries
- Powdered sugar, for dusting

DIRECTIONS

1. Coat a 13-by-18-inch rimmed baking sheet with cooking spray. Line with parchment, leaving a 2-inch overhang on the long sides. Coat parchment with cooking spray.
2. Sift flour and 1 3/4 teaspoons salt into a medium bowl. In a large bowl, cream the butter with a mixer on medium-high speed, occasionally scraping bowl, until fluffy, 3 to 4 minutes. With the mixer running, slowly add light brown sugar, beating until very pale and fluffy, about 2 minutes. Add flour mixture all at once, and beat on low speed until just incorporated.
3. Transfer the dough to the prepared baking sheet. Press the dough into an even layer that covers the bottom of the sheet. Cover and refrigerate until firm, about 20 minutes. Preheat oven to 300 degrees F. Bake the dough until the entire surface is golden brown, about 30-35 minutes. Let the cookie base cool completely in the baking sheet. Raise oven temperature to 350 degrees F.
4. In a large bowl, beat the softened cream cheese with a mixer on medium speed, occasionally scraping bowl, until fluffy, about 3 minutes. Reduce speed to low and add granulated sugar in a slow, steady stream. Scrape the bowl, then mix in lemon zest, vanilla and a pinch of salt until well combined. Scrape the bowl, then beat in the eggs, 1 at a time, until incorporated. The mixture should be very smooth; scrape the bowl as necessary. Pour the cheesecake batter over the crust and spread into an even layer.
5. Bake the cheesecake until the filling is set, about 20-25 minutes. Let the cheesecake cool completely in the baking sheet. Refrigerate until firm and cold, about 4 hours (or overnight).
6. Run a sharp knife along short sides of sheet, and use the parchment overhangs to lift out the cheesecake. Run the knife under hot water and dry well. Use it to cut the cheesecake into 48 squares, wiping the knife clean between cuts.
7. Transfer squares to a serving platter, reforming the rectangle. Decorate the top left squares (3 down and 4 across), with a mound of blueberries on each square. Use raspberries (about 4 per square) to decorate the 1st, 3rd and 5th rows (the 1st and 3rd rows are shorter rows since part of them are decorated with blueberries). Decorate the remaining rows in one of two ways: either dust them with powdered sugar for a completely white row or place three cut strawberries on each square and dust the tops of the strawberries with powdered sugar. If using this method (to dust the strawberries with powdered sugar), dust the strawberries immediately before serving as the powdered sugar will begin to dissolve into the juiciness of the strawberries.
8. Serve immediately (or refrigerate for up to 3 hours).