

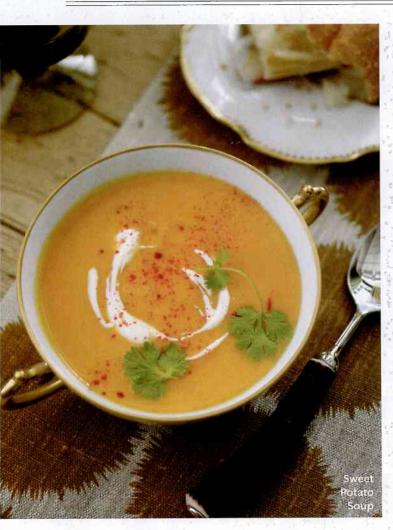


HOW TO For an easy centerpiece, chisel a shallow cavity into a birch log. Insert a pillar candle into the indentation, and wrap with twigs and moss to finish the earthy look. SIT DOWN FOR A This hearty midwinter's meal showcases the bounty of the season and pairs especially well with a crackling fire DECEMBER 2012 | SOUTHERN LIVING | 75.

he sign of a successful dinner party isn't necessarily a scraped-clean plate. Rather, it's the unapologetic *lingering* that follows a satisfying meal—the warm,

fuzzy, let's-stay-a-little-longer glow that stems from good conversation (and, okay, good wine). Consider this casually elegant four-course menu a delicious backdrop for just that.

Invite by Toast & Laurel of Houston, TX; available on minted.com



BOWL 'EM OVER Think of this silky, golden puree as a canvas for any garnish, such as a swirl of sour cream spiked with lime, chipotle powder, and fresh cilantro leaves.

Sweet Potato Soup

MAKES 8 CUPS
HANDS-ON TIME 35 MIN.
TOTAL TIME 1 HOUR

Make the soup through Step 2 the day before. Reheat, and stir in the lime juice before serving.

- 2 Tbsp.
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 5 1/2 cups reduced-sodium fat-free chicken broth
 - 2 lb. sweet potatoes, peeled and chopped (2 large)
 - 1 cup apple cider
 - 1 tsp. minced canned chipotle pepper in adobo sauce
 - 1 tsp. salt
 - 2 Tbsp. fresh lime juice
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 2 tsp. fresh lime juice
- 1. Melt butter in a large saucepan over medium-high heat; add onion, and sauté 5 to 7 minutes or until tender. Add garlic; sauté 1 minute. Stir in broth and next 4 ingredients. Bring to a boil; reduce heat to medium-low, and simmer 20 minutes or until potatoes are tender.
- 2. Process mixture with a handheld blender until smooth. (If you don't have a handheld blender, cool mixture 10 minutes, and process, in batches, in a regular blender until smooth. Return to saucepan, and proceed with Step 3.)
- **5. Cook** potato mixture over low heat, stirring occasionally, 5 minutes or until thoroughly heated. Stir in 2 Tbsp. lime juice. Whisk together sour cream and 2 tsp. lime juice. Ladle soup into bowls, and drizzle each serving with sour cream mixture.

Arugula-Pear-Blue Cheese Salad

MAKES 8 SERVINGS
HANDS-ON TIME 15 MIN.
TOTAL-TIME 15 MIN.

- 1/4 cup plus 2 Tbsp. pear preserves
- 1/2 cup Champagne vinegar
- 1 shallot, sliced
- 2 tsp. Dijon mustard
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1/4 tsp. freshly ground pepper
- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 8 cups loosely packed arugula
- 2 Bartlett pears, cut into 6 wedges each
- 4 oz. blue cheese, crumbled
- 1/4 cup chopped toasted walnuts
- 1. Process 1/4 cup preserves and next 5 ingredients in a food processor 30 seconds to 1 minute or until smooth. With processor running, pour oil through food chute in a slow steady, stream, processing until smooth. Transfer to a 2-cup measuring cup or small bowl, and stir in remaining 2 Tbsp. pear preserves.
- 2. Place arugula in a large serving bowl. Top with pears, blue cheese, and walnuts. Drizzle with vinalgrette.







SET THE TABLE

Create the perfect mix of elegant and organic by using pieces that take inspiration from nature, such as wood-handled flatware and faux-bois and mushroom plates. Runners placed crosswise down a farmhouse table give the texture of table linens without covering up the rugged beauty of the furniture—plus they double as place mats.

Cranberry Roasted Winter Vegetables

MAKES 8 SERVINGS
HANDS-ON TIME 30 MIN.
TOTAL TIME 1 HOUR, 5 MIN.

Roast the vegetables before the pork roast. Then, put them back in the oven to reheat while the pork rests.

- 4 large carrots (about 1½ lb.), halved lengthwise and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 3 large turnips (about 2 lb.), peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces*
- 1 lb. Brussels sprouts, halved (quartered, if large)
- 1 Tbsp. minced fresh rosemary
- 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- 3/4 tsp. salt
- 1/4 tsp. pepper
- 1 cup fresh or thawed frozen cranberries
- 4 tsp. molasses
- 1. Preheat oven to 400°. Lightly grease 2 large jelly-roll pans; place carrots and turnips in one pan and Brussels sprouts in second pan. Divide rosemary and next 3 ingredients between carrot mixture and Brussels sprouts; toss each to coat.

- 2. Bake both pans at 400° at the same time. Bake carrot mixture 30 minutes, stirring once; add cranberries, and bake 5 minutes or until carrots and turnips are tender and browned and cranberries begin to soften. Bake Brussels sprouts 15 to 20 minutes or until tender and browned, stirring once.
- **3. Remove** vegetables from oven, and combine in a large serving bowl. Drizzle with molasses, and toss to coat.
- *2 lb. parsnips may be substituted.

Pork Roast with Sweet Onion-Pumpkin Seed Relish

MAKES 8 SERVINGS
HANDS-ON TIME 20 MIN.
TOTAL TIME 1 HOUR, 50 MIN.

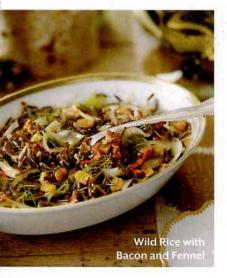
Be sure to ask your butcher to cut out the chine bone and to french the rib rack for easy carving and an elegant presentation.

- 11/4 tsp. salt, divided
- 1/2 tsp. freshly ground pepper
 - 1 (5-lb.) 8-rib bone-in pork loin roast, chine bone removed
- 1 Tbsp. minced fresh rosemary
- 4 tsp. minced fresh thyme, divided
- 3 large sweet onions (about 2 lb.), cut into 1/2-inch-thick rings
- 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1/8 tsp. freshly ground pepper
- 1 tsp. white wine vinegar
- 1 tsp. light brown sugar
- 1/4 cup toasted pumpkin seeds
- 1. Preheat oven to 450°. Sprinkle I tsp. salt and 1/2 tsp. pepper over pork; rub rosemary and I Tbsp. thyme over pork. Place pork in a lightly greased roasting pan.
- 2. Toss together onions, olive oil, 1/8 tsp. pepper, and remaining 1/4 tsp. salt until coated. Arrange onions around pork.
- **3. Bake** at 450° for 30 minutes; reduce oven temperature to 375°. Bake 50 more minutes or until a meat thermometer inserted into thickest portion registers 145°, stirring onions once. Transfer pork to a cutting board; cover loosely with aluminum foil, and let stand 10 minutes before slicing.
- **4. Meanwhile,** coarsely chop onions; transfer to a bowl. Stir in vinegar, brown sugar, and remaining 1 tsp. thyme. Stir in pumpkin seeds before serving. Serve pork with relish.









Wild Rice with Bacon and Fennel

MAKES 8 SERVINGS HANDS-ON TIME 40 MIN. TOTAL TIME 1 HOUR, 5 MIN.

Use wild rice, not a blend, for the best texture.

- 11/3 cups uncooked wild rice
 - 4 bacon slices
 - large fennel bulb, thinly sliced
 - large onion, cut into thin wedges
 - 2 garlic cloves, minced

- 1/2 cup reduced-sodium fat-free chicken broth
- 1/3 cup golden raisins
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 1/8 tsp. pepper
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh fennel fronds or flat-leaf parsley
- 1 Tbsp. white wine vinegar
- 1/2 cup chopped toasted walnuts
- **1. Cook** wild rice according to package directions; drain.
- **2. Meanwhile,** cook bacon in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat 7 to 8 minutes or until crisp; drain

on paper towels, reserving 1 Tbsp. drippings in skillet. Chop bacon.

- **3. Sauté** fennel bulb and onion in hot drippings over medium-high heat 5 minutes or until softened. Add garlic; sauté 1 minute. Add broth and next 3 ingredients; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to mediumlow; cover and simmer 8 minutes or until tender. Stir in rice and bacon; cook, stirring often, 3 minutes.
- **4. Transfer** to a large serving bowl. Stir in fennel fronds and vinegar. Stir in walnuts just before serving.

Gingerbread Soufflés

MAKES 10 SERVINGS
HANDS-ON TIME 20 MIN

TOTAL TIME 1 HOUR, 30 MIN.

This impressive dessert isn't difficult, but do plan ahead. Preheat the oven, and just before sitting down to dinner, pop the soufflés in. When done, serve them all puffed up and gorgeous.

1 cup milk 1/2 cup sugar

- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 1/3 cup molasses
- 2 Tbsp. butter, softened
- 2 tsp. pumpkin pie spice
- 1 tsp. ground ginger
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- 6 large eggs, separated
- 1/8 tsp. cream of tartar Sweetened whipped cream, crushed gingersnaps
- 1. Preheat oven to 350°. Whisk together first 4 ingredients in a medium saucepan until

smooth. Bring to a boil over medium heat, whisking constantly. Transfer mixture to a large bowl, and whisk in molasses and next 4 ingredients. Cool 15 minutes. Whisk in egg yolks.

- **2. Butter** 10 (7-oz.) ramekins; sprinkle with sugar to coat, and shake out excess.
- 3. Beat egg whites and cream of tartar at high speed with an electric mixer until stiff peaks form. Fold one-third of egg white mixture

into milk mixture until well blended. Repeat twice with remaining egg white mixture. Spoon batter into prepared ramekins, leaving ³/4-inch space at top of each.

4. Bake at 350° for 25 minutes or until puffy and set. Serve immediately with whipped cream and crushed gingersnaps.

Note: You may also bake this in a 2 ½-qt. soufflé dish. Bake 55 to 60 minutes or until puffy and set.

