



December
2020



MEALS À LA MO



Polenta Party!

It's hard to let go of cherished celebrations. So, this season, make your meals with your immediate family parties to celebrate! Think out of the ordinary and pull together a rustic Polenta Party in no time. Creamy polenta, grilled sausages, caramelized onions, roasted garlic and tomatoes, good olives, and a wedge of Parmigiano Reggiano – lots of Northern Italian favorites.

Creamy Polenta



Ingredients

1 cup stone-ground polenta
5 cups water, divided

3 Tbl extra-virgin olive oil
½ tsp sea salt

Preparation

For a creamier texture, you can pulse the dry polenta in a blender first.

In a medium stock pot, bring 3 ½ cups of water to a high simmer. Slowly whisk in the polenta. Add 1 more cup of water and simmer for 15 minutes, stirring frequently. Continue to add water while stirring until you have the consistency you like. The polenta should be creamy.

Turn off the heat and whisk in the olive oil and sea salt. Want it even creamier? Add some cheese (Parmigiana Reggiano is classic, but creamy goat cheese or burrata are also great choices). Cover and let stand for 5 minutes. Season to taste and serve hot.

Polenta thickens as it cools. You can reheat, adding more water and/or olive oil to make it smooth and creamy.

Fun fact: In Northern Italy, polenta and all the wonderful accompaniments are served directly on large wooden boards that fill the table. It's a feast for all the senses.



Alliums I Love!



I never met an allium I didn't like. If you like onions and garlic, perhaps the best known members of the allium family, you'll probably love what chives, green onions/scallions, leeks, and shallots bring to the party, too.

- *Chives add a mild onion flavor and bright color to lots of dishes.*
- *Green onions are the baby bulbs with a mild taste – you can use the white and green parts.*
- *Leeks are the taller cousins – use only the white and pale-green parts. Rinse them carefully as their many layers can trap dirt.*
- *Shallots are the well-heeled and lovely purple and white bulbs that combine the best of the sweet onion and garlic flavors.*

A big Thank You to Rob Maya for his amazing graphic art work. Rob not only created the logo for Meals à la Mo, but many of our ECPG logos and designs!

Caramelized Onions/Roasted Garlic



Ingredients for Caramelized Onions

2 Tbs extra-virgin olive oil.
Kosher salt to taste

3 medium onions, halved and thinly sliced lengthwise

Preparation

Heat olive oil in a large skillet over medium-low heat. Add the sliced onions and pinch of salt. Cook, stirring frequently. As onions caramelize, scrape up the browned bits in the pan. The onions should start to color within 5 to 10 minutes.

Continue cooking and stirring until golden.

Use them as a topping for polenta, bruschetta, and pizza, or mix them in yogurt-based dips with a little freshly ground black pepper and dash of cayenne.



Roasted Garlic is simple. Preheat oven to 400° F. Peel the outside layer of skin, but leave enough to keep cloves bound together.

Cut ½ inch off top each garlic head to expose cloves. Tip: Put one head of garlic in each compartment of a muffin tin for easy, even baking.

Spread olive oil thoroughly over each head of garlic. Sprinkle with freshly ground pepper. Cover with aluminum foil and bake for 30 minutes. Baked cloves will pop right out of the skin to serve on crusty bread, in sauces, pastas, and mashed potatoes.

Marinated Artichoke Hearts



Ingredients

Juice of 1 lemon
3 Tbl extra-virgin olive oil
Kosher salt to taste
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
¼ tsp each dried basil, oregano, parsley
flakes

Pinch of red pepper flakes
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 (14 oz) can quartered artichoke hearts,
drained

Preparation

Combine lemon juice, olive oil, salt, herbs, red pepper, and garlic in a resealable container large enough to fit the artichoke hearts.

Seal and shake the container to emulsify ingredients.

Remove the lid and add the artichoke hearts. Reseal and continue shaking the container until the artichoke hearts are completely coated.

Let marinate in the refrigerator over night to blend flavors.



Greek Meze

Gather with family for a casual bite – or two! Meze means a taste, or a bite. And, you can choose your favorites – pairing bright flavors with intense colors for a spectacular, but easy, celebration.

Here, I'm serving spanakopita, Greek salad, chicken souvlaki, marinated artichoke hearts, dolmas (stuffed grape leaves), toasted pine nuts, Feta cheese, roasted red peppers, hummus, and pita wedges (soft and toasted into crisp chips).

Roasted Red Peppers



Ingredients

6 bell peppers (red or a mix of colors)

2 Tbl red wine vinegar

2 Tbl extra-virgin olive oil

Preparation

Preheat oven to 350° F.

Roast peppers whole until skins turn brown and peppers begin to soften.

Remove peppers from oven; tent plastic wrap over. Let cool until they can be handled.

Remove and discard pepper stems, seeds, and skin. Slice into wedges or strips.

Arrange in bowl or on platter. Drizzle with oil and vinegar. Marinate at least 30 minutes.

Uses for Roasted Peppers

So many ways to bring a smoky, tangy flavor to foods you love.

Stir into pasta sauces; top pizzas; fold into frittatas; or make a simple soup:

Simmer roasted peppers in a good broth; puree with some fresh cream. Stir in salt, pepper, and top with fresh basil.





Flatbreads

Many cultures have their own version of flatbread, and any would go well with your Polenta Party or Greek Meze spread. Flatbreads were likely the first breads ever made. As their name implies, they are flat, often unleavened (but not always), and can be soft, chewy, crisp, or even stuffed.

Here are just a few of the hundreds of types of flatbreads. How many do you recognize?

- **Bannock (Scotland)**
- **Crepes (France)**
- **Crispbread (Sweden)**
- **Damper (Australia)**
- **Focaccia (Italy)**
- **Frybread (Native American)**
- **Injera (Ethiopia)**
- **Lavash (Armenia)**
- **Lefse (Norway)**
- **Matzoh/Matzo; Matzah/Matza (Israel)**
- **Naan (India)**
- **Pita (Middle East)**
- **Pupusa (El Salvador)**
- **Tortillas (Mexico)**

Flatbread Word Find

See how many flatbreads you can find (vertical, horizontal, diagonal, forward, backward...) in the puzzle.

Flatbreads Around the World

- Arepa
- Bannock
- Chapati
- Crepe
- Crispbread
- Damper
- Focaccia
- Frybread
- Injera
- Johnnycake
- Kesra
- Khachapuri
- Kulcha
- Lavash
- Lefse
- Matzoh
- Naan
- Paratha
- Parotta
- Phulka
- Pita
- Pupusa
- Roti
- Shrak
- Talo
- Tortilla

S	A	L	G	Q	A	I	C	C	A	C	O	F	A
E	L	E	K	A	C	Y	N	N	H	O	J	R	H
P	L	F	A	I	K	E	S	R	A	I	L	Y	T
E	I	S	R	T	W	K	C	O	N	N	A	B	A
R	T	E	H	A	T	I	P	J	X	N	V	R	R
C	R	I	S	P	B	R	E	A	D	Z	A	E	A
A	O	G	Z	A	X	R	P	U	P	U	S	A	P
R	T	T	W	H	A	M	A	T	Z	O	H	D	N
E	K	H	A	C	H	A	P	U	R	I	T	O	R
P	Q	K	U	L	C	H	A	R	E	P	M	A	D
A	G	A	T	T	O	R	A	P	H	U	L	K	A

Hummus



Ingredients

1 (15 oz) can chickpeas

½ cup fresh lemon juice (2 large lemons)

¼ cup well-stirred tahini

2 cloves garlic, chopped

2 Tbl. Extra-virgin olive oil

½ tsp ground cumin

½ tsp ground coriander

1 tsp Tabasco

2-3 Tbl water

Fresh parsley, toasted pine nuts, paprika, and lemon slices for garnish

Preparation

Combine tahini and lemon juice in blender for 1-2 mins, scraping bowl.

Add olive oil, garlic, cumin, coriander, and Tabasco. Blend 30 seconds. Scrape bowl. Blend 30 seconds.

Drain and rinse chickpeas. Add half to blender – blend 1 minute. Stir in other half of chickpeas and blend until thick and smooth – 1 to 2 minutes.

Slowly add water if needed and blend until smooth.

Top with drizzle of olive oil, toasted pine nuts, fresh parsley, paprika, and lemon slices.

Greek Grilled Chicken Souvlaki (Meat on Skewers)



Ingredients

1 tsp freshly ground black pepper
2 cloves garlic, crushed
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
2 tsp kosher salt
Juice from 2 lemons
1 ½ Tbl dried oregano

Preparation

In medium bowl, whisk together olive oil, lemon juice, crushed garlic, oregano, rosemary, parsley, salt, and pepper. Add the cubed chicken and stir to coat well. Cover bowl and refrigerate 2 hours to marinate.

While chicken is marinating, soak wooden skewers in water.

Remove chicken and fill skewers (leave a little breathing room between chicken cubes).

1 ½ Tbl rosemary, cracked
1 Tbl fresh parsley, chopped
2 lbs boneless, skinless chicken, cut in cubes



Discard marinade.

Grill chicken over medium-high heat for 8 to 10 minutes, turning occasionally to cook evenly. Remove from grill and rest for 7-8 minutes prior to serving.

Hot Chocolate Bar!

Usually I focus on Healthy Foods – but, the Holidays are Here (and colder days)! Time for a treat or two to warm your family and bring lots of smiles.

Keeping with the Party Theme of lots of food to share – here's my take on a Holiday Hot Chocolate Bar. Top your mug of cocoa with marshmallows, whipped cream, cinnamon sticks, mini gingerbread men or pirouette cookies, crushed candy canes, sprinkles, crystallized ginger, fudge sauce and dulce de leche, or whatever visions of sugar plums dance in your head.

Don't forget your four-legged furry friends! (No chocolate for them – but lots of fun treats available, such as these dog-friendly snowmen and candy cane cookies, at your local pet store.)



Hot Cocoa



Basic Cocoa Ingredients:

- ¼ cup unsweetened cocoa powder (I like Dagoba)
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 1/3 cup hot water
- 1/8 tsp Kosher salt
- 4 cups milk (dairy or non – Almond, Soy, Coconut)
- 1 tsp vanilla

Preparation

In a medium saucepan, combine cocoa powder, sugar, water, and salt over medium heat.

Bring to a simmer, stirring constantly, until smooth.

Reduce heat and stir in the milk (do not bring to a boil).

Remove from heat and stir in vanilla.

Pour in mugs and let your friends and family choose their favorite toppings.

Mexican Chocolate à la Mo (pictured left):

When I can get Mexican chocolate (Ibarra), I love to mix it in my cocoa, top my mug with whipped cream, cinnamon, Churro “Smash Mallows,” and a drizzle of dulce de leche. It’s a once-a-year treat, but so good!

Note: coffee lovers might enjoy a sprinkle of espresso powder, chocolate-espresso-dipped Smash Mallows, and rock-candy wand to stir.



Peppermint Bark



Ingredients

12 ounces 60% semisweet chocolate chips

16 ounces white chocolate chips

½ tsp peppermint extract

¾ cup crushed candy canes

¼ cup white candy snowflakes and pearl dragées.

Preparation

Place semisweet chocolate chips in a medium microwave-safe bowl and microwave for 30-second increments (stirring between each), until melted and smooth.

Spread the chocolate onto a 9" x 13" pan lined with parchment paper. Refrigerate for 15 minutes to set.

Place the white chocolate chips in a medium microwave safe bowl and microwave for

BARK MORE (AND WAG MORE, TOO)!

Got a favorite flavor combination? Make your bark as good as your bite by customizing...

- Add holiday M&M's
- Almond Joy! Replace peppermint with almond or coconut extract and top with chopped almonds and dried flaked coconut
- Spice it up with chopped crystallized ginger, pistachios, and dried cranberries

30-second increments (stirring between each), until melted and smooth. Add peppermint extract and stir.

Spread the white chocolate over the cooled semisweet chocolate layer. Sprinkle crushed candy canes and snowflakes/dragées over top. Refrigerate about 20 minutes til hard. Break into pieces.



"A candle is a small thing.
But one candle can light another.
And see how its own light increases,
as a candle gives its flame to the other.
You are such a light."

— Moshe Davis

Rugelach



Ingredients

2 cups all-purpose flour

½ tsp salt

1 cup organic unsalted butter, softened

8 oz. cream cheese, softened

½ cup fine baking sugar

1 tsp ground cinnamon

1 cup fig preserves

1 cup loosely packed golden raisins,
chopped

1 cup walnuts, chopped

Milk

Preparation

Whisk flour and salt in bowl. With mixer, beat butter and cream cheese in separate bowl. Add flour mixture and stir with wooden spoon until a soft dough forms. Gather dough into a ball and wrap in plastic wrap. Flatten and chill until firm.

Preheat oven to 350° F. Line bottom of large shallow baking pan with parchment paper.

Cut dough into 4 pieces. Work on one piece at a time (keep remaining dough chilled). Roll out one piece into 12" x 8" rectangle on floured surface. Transfer dough to a parchment-lined tray and chill. Repeat with remaining dough.

Whisk ½ cup sugar with cinnamon.

Arrange one dough rectangle on work surface.

Spread ¼ cup preserves evenly over dough. Sprinkle ¼ cup raisins and ¼ cup chopped walnuts over preserves. Sprinkle with 2 Tbl. cinnamon sugar.

Using parchment as an aid, roll dough into a log. Place, seam side down, in lined baking pan. Pinch ends closed. Repeat with 3 more logs. Brush logs with milk and sprinkle each with 1 tsp sugar. With sharp knife, make ¾ -inch-deep cuts crosswise (but not all the way through) dough at 1-inch intervals.

Bake until golden (about 50 minutes).

Cool 20-30 minutes (still slightly warm) and transfer logs to cutting board. Slice cookies all the way through.

Pineapple Upside Down Hummingbird Cake



For this Recipe, I am going to direct you to Grandbaby Cakes (<https://grandbaby-cakes.com/kwanzaa-feature-pineapple-upside-down/>). Jocelyn Delk Adams, inspired by her grandmother, shares classic recipes with a modern twist. Here's what Jocelyn had to say about this melt-in-your-mouth, moist, cake that will warm your hearts as much as your stomachs.

“The Hummingbird Cake, a cake historically made up of banana, pineapple, and nuts, reminds me of the very origins of Kwanzaa as it is deeply rooted in African-American, southern soul food tradition. The generational passed down tale is that the origin of the name “hummingbird cake” came from people humming when they tasted the cake.”

—Jocelyn Delk Adams



Cookies for Santa! Scottish Shortbread



*/**Mo's Favorites:

- Green tea/pecans/white chocolate
- Chai/almond/dark chocolate
- White tea/pistachios/milk chocolate

Ingredients

- 8 ounces Kerrygold unsalted butter, room temperature
- Pinch of salt
- ½ cup superfine baker's sugar (plus extra to sprinkle on top)
- 2 cups organic, unbleached, all-purpose flour
- ¾ cup cornstarch
- Leaves of 1 tea bag*
- ½ cup chopped nuts
- ½-cup chocolate chips** (Melt just before using)

Preparation

Preheat oven to 325 ° F.

In a large bowl, cream together the butter, salt, sugar, and leaves from one tea bag until light, fluffy, and pale in color.

In medium bowl, whisk together flour and cornstarch, and sift into the bowl with the butter and sugar. Mix quickly just to bring ingredients together. Don't overwork dough.

Pull dough onto a cold and lightly floured work surface.

Add chopped nuts. Knead lightly to form a loose dough.

Roll dough between 2 sheets of parchment paper to 1/4-inch thick. Prick the surface all over with a fork. Cut into desired shapes.

Place shortbreads on parchment-lined baking sheet. Bake for 25 minutes until pale brown. Cool. Dip one edge in melted chocolate. Cool until chocolate is set.



Next Month...

Warm, Hearty, Healthy Breakfasts

*Including Out-of-this-World Inspirations
from
Around the World*

Sharing good food with wonderful friends
is a great joy.

Let me know if you try any of these
recipes – and share your own recipes and
creative cooking tips for favorites that
warm your heart and home.

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