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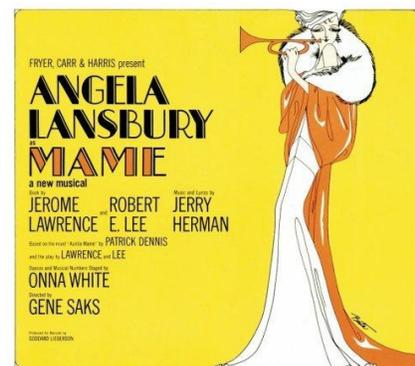
You can find lots more information on the web at www.susannye.com and www.susannye.wordpress.com

For cooking tips, recipes and more, connect with me on FaceBook www.facebook.com/swnye or follow me on Twitter at twitter.com/susannye Watch me cook on www.youtube.com/susannye

Contact me at susannye@tds.net
603/526 7319

Need a Little Christmas & Mushroom Crostini

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There's gloom, there's doom and it's dark at 4:00. Yes indeed, if we ever needed a little Christmas and we need it now. Maybe you don't remember the song from the classic musical *Mame*. Fired for the third or fourth time and flat broke, the unstoppable Auntie Mame tunelessly belts out orders for an early Christmas celebration. Mame is the ultimate optimist and definitely one my all-time favorite heroes. (Should I be worried that one of my heroes is a fictitious character?)

So with *We Need a Little Christmas* ringing in my ears, I suggest we all get going. (By the way, that's the Angela Lansbury Broadway version NOT Lucille Ball. I love Lucy but Mame she ain't.) It's time to invite family and friends around for a little cheer.

The possibilities are endless. You can serve champagne and a splendiferous spread of gourmet delicacies. Then again, a big batch of chili and case of beer may be more your style. Casual or fancy, the list of fun and festive party possibilities is as long or as short as your imagination. I tend towards more casual entertaining and here are a few ideas:

1. Organize a cookie swap and fill the house with the sweet scents of cinnamon and spice. Why not reinvent this age-old tradition with an evening dessert party. Let your friends bake the cookies for the swap while you glam it up with a fabulous buffet of luscious desserts and flutes of champagne.
2. Take it outside for a still sweet but more casual option. Light a bonfire in the snow, roast marshmallows and make s'mores. Sip hot cocoa (spiked or not) and watch the Geminid meteor showers.
3. Host a potluck but add a theme to spark your guests' creativity. You could ask everyone to think international and bring dishes from the country they would most like to visit. Or go the nostalgic route and invite your friends to cook up favorite holiday recipes from their childhood.
4. Dust off the piano keys or rent a karaoke machine and invite everyone over for caroling. The joint will be jumpin'. Make a joyful noise with everyone's favorites. Don't forget the traditional *Joy to the World*, the classic *Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer* and, of course, *Jingle Bell Rock*. When you're ready for a break, serve a simple supper of hearty soup, a platter of fruit and cheeses and some great country bread.
5. Who doesn't like a Yankee Swap? Although Yankee suggests a certain degree of frugality, as host you get to set the gift-giving guidelines. Make it a re-gifting celebration and watch your friends tearfully part with the plastic fish that sings Christmas carols and the T-shirt with the not so clever double-entendre. Creative types will love a handmade Christmas. Encourage everyone to get out their knitting needles, glue gun or recipe file. Gifts of gorgeous scarves and even more gorgeous Death by Chocolate sauce may be more serious than a whoopee cushion but they won't show up at next year's swap. Your foodie friends will love an epicurean exchange. Amazing cheeses, favorite cooking gadgets and a bottle of great wine will make prized gifts. Regardless of your theme, offer your friends a colorful feast of appetizers for a relaxed evening of nibbling, sipping and unwrapping.

Enjoy the holiday season and the special gifts of family and friendship,

Bon appétit!



Another recipe from Susan Nye: Fall 2011/Volume 272

Mushroom Crostini

A cozy and delicious hors d'oeuvre for your holiday party. You can find many more holiday recipes on my blog www.susannye.wordpress.com or website www.susannye.com. Enjoy!

Makes about 24 pieces

1 baguette, thinly sliced
1 1/2 pounds mushrooms, wiped clean with a damp cloth and stems removed
Extra virgin olive oil
Sherry vinegar
6 ounces pancetta or bacon, finely chopped (optional)
1 onion, thinly sliced
1 garlic clove, minced
1/4 cup heavy cream
1 teaspoon minced fresh rosemary
1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves
About 4 ounce grated Fontina cheese
About 1 ounce grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Arrange the baguette slices on rimmed baking sheets. Turning once, toast the baguette slices in the oven until golden, about 10 minutes. Cool. (Can be prepared ahead. Store in an airtight container at room temperature.

Put the mushrooms on rimmed baking sheets and drizzle with just enough equal parts olive oil and vinegar to lightly coat. Season with salt and pepper and toss to combine.

Roast the mushrooms cup side up in a single layer for 15 minutes. Turn the caps over and roast for an additional 5-10 minutes. The mushrooms should be nicely browned and shrunken. When the mushrooms are cool enough to handle, chop and reserve.

While the mushrooms roast, cook the pancetta. Heat a little olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the pancetta and cook until crispy. Drain the pancetta on paper towels and reserve.

Drain off most of the fat from the skillet, leaving just enough to lightly coat the bottom of the pan. (If you are skipping the pancetta, lightly coat the skillet with olive oil). Add the onion to the skillet, sprinkle with 1 1/2 teaspoons vinegar, season with salt and pepper and toss to combine. Sauté for 5 minutes, reduce the heat to low and cook slowly, stirring occasionally, until the onions are golden. Stir in the garlic and sauté for 1 minute. Stir in the mushrooms, pancetta, cream and herbs. Cool to room temperature and stir in the fontina. (Can be made ahead, cover and refrigerate.)

Preheat the oven to 450 degrees.

Top each toast with a generous spoonful of mushroom topping and sprinkle with Parmigiano-Reggiano. Place on rimmed baking sheets and bake until heated through and lightly browned. Transfer to serving platters and serve warm

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Susan Nye – Around the Table at www.susannye.wordpress.com