

The holiday season is a time of reflection, a time when we remember what an awesome and beautiful thing it is to share and celebrate with family and friends. Make cherries the centerpiece of your holiday meals.



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A Taste of the Holidays



2004



Continued from page 18 - Put butter and sugar in medium bowl. Beat with an electric mixer on medium speed 3 to 4 minutes, or until well blended. Add egg and vanilla; mix well. Add flour mixture; mix well.

Put chocolate chips and milk in a small saucepan. Heat, stirring constantly, over low heat until chocolate melts. Stir in reserve maraschino cherry juice. Let cool slightly.

Shape dough into 1-inch balls. Place on ungreased baking pan. Push in centers with thumb; spoon 1 teaspoon chocolate mixture into each thumbprint and top with a cherry. Bake in 350-degree oven 10 to 12 minutes, or until cookies are firm. Remove to wire racks. Let cool completely. Store in an airtight container.

Makes about 3 dozens.

CHOCOLATE CHERRY BOMBS

1 (10-ounce) jar maraschino cherries with stems
2 cups vanilla ice cream, softened
1 (7.25-ounce) bottle chocolate shell topping

Drain cherries. Remove stems and save them to complete the recipe. Place cherries and 1 cup ice cream in electric blender. Pulse to combine.

Combine cherry mixture with remaining 1 cup ice cream in a medium bowl; mix with a spoon. Divide between 2 small (8-ounce) bowls. Cover and freeze overnight or until firm.

Line a baking sheet with wax paper. Shake chocolate shell topping 30 seconds; divide between 2 custard cups or small bowls. Remove 1 container of ice cream from freezer. Using a small ice cream scoop, scoop 1 (1½-inch) ball; place on fork. Spoon chocolate shell topping over ball while holding over custard cup. Place on baking sheet; quickly insert 1 reserved cherry stem in top. (To remove ball from fork, push off gently at base with knife). Repeat with remaining ice cream. Work quickly so ice cream does not get too soft. Place cherry bombs in freezer.

Repeat procedure with remaining bowl of ice cream. Freeze until ready to serve.

Makes 16 (1½-inch) cherry bombs.

HO HO SURPRISES

48 red or green maraschino cherries (about one 16-ounce jar)
 1 cup butter or margarine, softened
 1/3 cup confectioners' sugar
 1/2 teaspoon almond extract
 2-1/4 cups all-purpose flour
 1/4 teaspoon salt
 1/2 cup finely chopped pecans
 Confectioners' sugar

Drain maraschino cherries thoroughly on paper towels; set aside. Put butter and 1/3 cup confectioners' sugar in a large mixing bowl. Beat with an electric mixer on medium speed 3 to 4 minutes, or until well mixed. Stir in almond extract. Add flour and salt; mix well. Stir in pecans.

Shape about 2 teaspoons dough around each cherry. Place on an ungreased cookie sheet about 1 inch apart. Bake in a preheated 375-degree oven 12 to 15 minutes, or until set but not brown. Roll in confectioners' sugar while still warm. Let cool. If desired, roll in confectioners' sugar again. Makes 4 dozen.

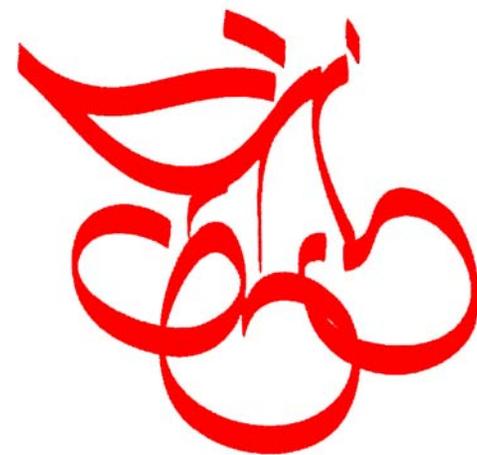
THUMBPRINT COOKIES

2 (10-ounce) jars maraschino cherries
 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
 1/2 cup unsweetened cocoa
 1/4 teaspoon each salt
 1/2 baking powder
 1/2 cup butter or margarine, softened
 1 cup sugar
 1 egg
 1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla
 1 cup semisweet chocolate chips
 2 tablespoons milk

Drain maraschino cherries, reserving 1 teaspoon juice. Combine flour, cocoa, salt, and baking powder in a large mixing bowl; mix well.

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FESTIVE CHERRY PUNCH

4 cups cherry juice or cherry juice blend, chilled
 1 (1-liter) bottle ginger ale, chilled
 Ice ring (instructions follow)

Just before serving, combine cherry juice blend and ginger ale in a large punch bowl. Add ice ring.

Makes about 16 servings.

For decorative ice ring: Place a ring mold or other decorative mold in freezer; let chill. Rinse inside of mold with cold water; return to freezer until thin coating of ice forms. Cover the bottom of the mold in a decorative pattern with maraschino cherries. Gently add enough cherry juice blend to just cover fruit. Freeze until firm. Gently add more cherry juice blend to fill mold completely. Freeze overnight, or until firm.

SENSATIONAL STUFFED MUSHROOMS

30 large mushrooms (about 1 pound)
 ½ pound bulk pork sausage
 1 cup chopped dried tart cherries
 2 green onions, sliced
 1 8-ounce package cream cheese, softened

Pull stems from mushrooms and discard (or save for another use). Rinse mushroom caps; drain well. Set aside.

Cook sausage in a large skillet, stirring to break up meat, 5 minutes, or until sausage is done. Remove from heat. Add dried cherries, onions and cream cheese; mix well. Fill each mushroom cap with a heaping teaspoonful of sausage mixture.

Place filled mushrooms on a lightly greased baking sheet. Bake in a preheated 425° oven 6 to 8 minutes. Serve immediately.

Makes 30.

HOLIDAY COFFEE CAKE

1 (10-ounce) jar maraschino cherries
 1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese, softened
 1/2 cup slivered almonds
 1/2 cup granulated sugar
 1/2 teaspoon almond extract
 2 (8-ounce) packages crescent rolls
 1/2 cup confectioners' sugar
 1 to 2 teaspoons milk
 1/4 teaspoon almond extract

Drain maraschino cherries; discard juice or save for another use. Reserve 10 maraschino cherries for garnish; chop remaining cherries. Combine chopped cherries, cream cheese, almonds, sugar, and almond extract; mix well.

Separate each can of crescent roll dough into 2 rectangles; press firmly at edges and perforations to make one large rectangle. Roll or pat into a rectangle about 15x13 inches.

Spread cream cheese mixture over dough. Roll up dough starting at long side of rectangle. Place seam-side down on greased baking sheet. Form into a ring, firmly pressing ends together. With scissors or a sharp knife, cut almost through ring at 1-inch intervals. Turn each section slightly on its side.

Bake in a preheated 350-degree oven 20 to 25 minutes or until golden brown. If necessary, cover with foil during last 5 minutes to prevent over browning. Carefully remove from pan to wire rack.

Combine confectioners' sugar, milk and almond extract to make a glaze. Drizzle over coffee cake. Garnish with reserved whole cherries. Refrigerate leftovers.

Makes about 15 servings.

CHRISTIMAS BREAD



- 1-1/3 cups maraschino cherries (10-ounce jar)
- 1-3/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/3 cup butter or margarine, softened
- 2/3 cup firmly packed brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup mashed ripe bananas
- 1/2 cup chopped macadamia nuts or walnuts

Drain maraschino cherries, reserving 2 tablespoons juice. Cut cherries into quarters; set aside. Combine flour, baking powder and salt; set aside.

Combine butter, brown sugar, eggs and reserved cherry juice in a large mixing bowl. Mix on medium speed with an electric mixer until ingredients are thoroughly combined. Add flour mixture and mashed bananas alternately, beginning and ending with flour mixture. Stir in drained cherries and nuts. Lightly spray a 9x5x3-inch baking pan with non-stick cooking spray. Spread batter evenly in pan.

Bake in a preheated 350-degree oven 1 hour, or until golden brown and wooden pick inserted near center comes out clean. Remove from pan; let cool on wire rack. Store in a tightly covered container.

Makes 1 loaf, about 16 slices.

CRUNCHY CHERRY PARTY MIX

- 4 cups bite-size corn or rice square cereal (such as Corn or Rice Chex)
- 2 cups bite-size wheat square cereal (such as Wheat Chex)
- 2 cups broken whole grain Melba toast
- 2 cups small fat-free pretzel twists
- 3 tablespoons margarine or butter, melted
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 2 teaspoons chili powder
- 1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/4 teaspoon onion powder
- 1/8 teaspoon ground red pepper
- 1-1/2 cups dried tart cherries

Put corn or rice cereal, wheat cereal, Melba toast and pretzels in a large bowl; stir to mix. In a glass measuring cup or small bowl, stir together melted margarine or butter, Worcestershire sauce, chili powder, garlic powder, onion powder and ground red pepper. Drizzle over cereal mixture. Toss to coat.



Spread cereal mixture in a 15x10x1-inch (or a 13x9x2-inch) baking pan. Bake in a preheated 300-degree oven about 25 minutes, stirring every 7 to 8 minutes. Remove from oven; stir in dried cherries.

Pour onto aluminum foil to cool completely. Store in a tightly covered container for up to 1 week.

Makes 20 (1/2 cup) servings.

Note: For a whole new flavor, substitute 1 tablespoon jerk blend seasoning mix for the chili powder, garlic powder, onion powder, and red pepper.

CHERRY RELISH FOR TURKEY

1/2 cup dried tart cherries
 1/2 cup cherry preserves
 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
 1/2 cup chopped red onion
 1/4 chopped yellow bell pepper
 1/4 chopped green bell pepper
 1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh thyme (or 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme)

Combine dried cherries, preserves and vinegar in a small microwave-safe bowl; mix well. Microwave on High (100% power) 1 to 1-1/2 minutes, or until hot. Let stand 5 minutes.

Stir in red onion, yellow and green bell pepper and thyme; mix well. Refrigerate, covered, 3 to 4 hours or overnight. Serve as a sauce with roast turkey or chicken. This relish is also good with grilled hamburgers. Makes about 1-1/2 cups; enough for 6 to 8 servings.

TURKEY SPIRAL WITH ONION-DRIED CHERRY STUFFING

Onion Cherry Stuffing:

6 tablespoons salted butter
 1 cup diced yellow onions
 1/2 cup diced celery
 1/2 cup diced mushrooms
 1-1/2 teaspoons minced garlic
 1/2 teaspoon salt
 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
 4 cups diced, day-old bread
 1-1/2 teaspoons minced fresh sage
 1-1/2 teaspoons minced fresh rosemary
 1-1/2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme
 1/4 cup minced fresh parsley
 1/8 teaspoon celery seed
 1/3 cup chopped toasted hazelnuts
 3/4 cup coarsely chopped dried tart cherries
 1/2 cup turkey or chicken broth
 2 eggs, beaten

HEAVENLY EGGNOG

1 10-ounce jar maraschino cherries
 1 quart plus 1 cup prepared eggnog (regular or reduced fat), divided
 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Drain cherries reserving juice (about 1/2 cup). Place one cherry in each compartments of 1-inch ice cube tray. Fill tray with 1 cup eggnog. Freeze until solid. Stir reserve cherry juice and vanilla into 1 quart eggnog; refrigerate until ready to use. When ready to serve, place eggnog ice cubes in glasses. Fill with cherry flavored eggnog. (Eggnog will not be diluted by the water of regular ice cubes. Rather the flavor will be maintained with the eggnog cubes). Makes 8 (4-Ounce) Servings.

CHERRY SPICE BARS

1 (10-ounce) jar maraschino cherries
 1 (18-1/4-ounce) spice cake mix
 1/4 cup butter or margarine, melted
 1/4 cup firmly packed brown sugar
 1/4 cup water
 2 eggs
 Glaze:
 1 cup confectioners' sugar
 1 tablespoon lemon juice
 1 to 2 teaspoons milk

Drain maraschino cherries; discard juice or save for another use. Cut cherries in half. Combine dry cake mix, melted butter, brown sugar, water and eggs in a large mixing bowl; mix with a spoon or electric mixer until well combined and smooth. Stir in maraschino cherries. Spread batter into a greased 13x9x2-inch baking pan.

Bake in a preheated 375-degree oven 20 to 25 minutes, or until top springs back when lightly touched. Let cool in pan on wire rack.

For the glaze, combine confectioners' sugar and lemon juice; add enough milk to make a thick glaze. Drizzle glaze over cake. Allow glaze to set. Cut into bars. Store, up to one week, in an airtight container with sheets of waxed paper between each layer of bars.

Makes 2 dozen bars.



Melt butter in a heavy saucepan over medium heat. Add onions, celery, mushrooms, garlic, salt and pepper. Cook 7 to 10 minutes, or until just beginning to brown.

Add bread, sage, rosemary, thyme, parsley, celery seed, hazelnuts and dried cherries. Cook 5 more minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat. Add broth and eggs, stirring well to combine. Set aside until cool enough to handle.

To form Turkey Spiral:

- 1 whole turkey breast, bone in weight 5 to 6 pounds
- Stuffing from above
- 2 tablespoons salted butter, melted

Bone out turkey breast lobes, keeping skin intact. Lay each lobe onto work surface, skin side down.

Cutting from where center breast bone was, butterfly breast open. (Slice turkey breast horizontally, not all the way through.) Open up butterflied turkey breast, keeping skin side down, and pound lightly to even thickness to about 1 inch overall.

Divide stuffing mixture in half; place on flesh side of each turkey breast lobe. Spread mixture evenly and pat into place. Roll up turkey breast, jelly-roll style, so the skin ends up on the outside of the roll. Repeat with other lobe of turkey breast.

Place each turkey spiral onto a large piece of aluminum foil. Brush turkey all over with melted butter. Tightly seal up turkey breast in foil. (This will prevent it from unrolling while baking.)

Place foil wrapped spirals onto a baking sheet. Bake in a preheated 375-degree oven 30 minutes. Open up foil to expose top of spiral and baste with accumulated pan drippings. Bake another 30 to 45 minutes basting occasionally, until internal temperature reaches 165 degrees Fahrenheit.

Remove from oven and let rest 10 minutes before slicing. Then slice into 1/2 inch slices and serve. This also makes beautiful turkey sandwiches!

Makes 12 servings; approximately 5-1/2 ounces each, baked.

HAM SPIRALS

1 (3-ounce) package cream cheese, softened
1/4 cup finely chopped dried tart cherries
3 tablespoons finely chopped pecans
2 tablespoons mayonnaise
1/2 teaspoon honey mustard or spicy brown mustard
4 thin slices cooked ham

Combine cream cheese, dried cherries, pecans, mayonnaise and mustard in a small bowl; mix well.

Spread cherry mixture evenly on ham slices. Roll up jelly-roll style; fasten with wooden picks. Let chill several hours. Remove wooden picks. Slice each ham roll crosswise into 1/4-inch slices; serve with crackers.

Makes about 40 (1/4-inch) pieces.

GINGERED CHERRY SAUCE FOR PORK

1 (21-ounce) can cherry pie filling
2 tablespoons honey
1 teaspoon fresh lime juice
3/4 teaspoon grated fresh ginger
1/2 teaspoon dry mustard
1/2 teaspoon grated lime peel

Combine cherry pie filling, honey, lime juice, ginger, dry mustard and lime peel in a medium saucepan; mix well. Bring to a boil over medium heat, stirring frequently. Reduce heat; simmer, uncovered, 1 minute, stirring frequently. Serve with sliced ham or pork.

Makes 2 cups.

CHERRY BLOSSOMS

2/3 cup sifted confectioners' sugar
1/4 cup milk
1 cup dried tart cherries, divided
1/4 cup coarsely chopped pecans
1 (14- to 16-ounce) loaf frozen white bread dough, thawed
2 tablespoons butter or margarine, melted
1/4 cup brown sugar
1 1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon



In a small mixing bowl, combine confectioners' sugar and milk; mix well. Pour mixture into a 9-inch deep-dish pie pan. Sprinkle 1/2 cup of the cherries and pecans evenly over sugar mixture.

On a lightly floured surface, roll bread dough into a 12x8-inch rectangle; brush with melted butter. In a small mixing bowl, combine brown sugar and cinnamon; sprinkle over dough. Top with remaining 1/2 cup cherries. Roll up rectangle, jelly-roll style, starting from a long side; pinch to seal edges. With a sharp knife, cut roll into 12 slices.

Place slices, cut-side down, on top of mixture in pan. Let rise, covered, in a warm place 30 minutes, or until nearly double. (Or, cover with waxed paper, then with plastic wrap. Refrigerate 2 to 24 hours. Before baking, let chilled rolls stand, covered, 20 minutes at room temperature.)

Bake, uncovered, in a preheated 375-degree oven 20 to 25 minutes for unchilled rolls and 25 to 30 minutes for chilled rolls, or until golden brown. If necessary, cover rolls with foil the last 10 minutes to prevent over browning. Let cool in pan 1 to 2 minutes. Invert onto a serving platter. Serve warm.

Makes 12 rolls.

RIBBON OF CHERRY CHEESECAKE

1 cup sliced almonds
 1 cup graham cracker crumbs
 1/3 cup butter or margarine, melted
 1 (21-ounce) can cherry filling and topping
 3/4 cup plus 2 tablespoons granulated sugar, divided
 2 tablespoons cornstarch
 1/2 teaspoon almond extract
 4 (8-ounce) packages cream cheese, softened
 3 tablespoons amaretto liqueur
 1 tablespoon lemon juice
 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
 3 eggs, slightly beaten

Toast almonds in a skillet over medium heat. Remove from heat; finely chop almonds. Combine almonds, graham cracker crumbs and butter in a medium bowl; mix well. Press crumb mixture evenly over the bottom and 2 inches up the sides of a 10-inch springform pan. Set aside.

Puree cherry filling in an electric blender or food processor until smooth. Pour pureed cherry filling into a medium saucepan. Combine 2 tablespoons granulated sugar and cornstarch; stir into cherry filling. Cook, stirring constantly, over low heat until mixture is thick and bubbly. Remove from heat. Stir in almond extract. Set aside to cool.

Put cream cheese, remaining 3/4 cup sugar, amaretto, lemon juice and vanilla in a large mixing bowl. Beat with an electric mixer on medium speed 3 to 4 minutes, or until well mixed. Add eggs all at once; beat on low just until mixed.

To assemble the cheesecake, pour one-third of the cream cheese mixture into prepared crust. Top with about 1/3 cup cherry puree. Swirl cherry mixture into cream cheese mixture, using a knife or spatula. Repeat layers twice, ending with cherry puree. Reserve remaining puree.

Bake in a preheated 350-degree oven 60 to 65 minutes, or until the center appears nearly set when gently shaken. Cool on a wire rack. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

To serve, spoon a generous tablespoon of puree on serving plate. Place cheesecake wedge on top of the puree.

Makes 16 servings.

WHITE CHOCOLATE CHEESECAKE

1 cup pecan halves, divided
 1 1/2 cups graham cracker crumbs
 1/4 cup sugar
 1/4 cup margarine or butter, melted
 3 (8-ounce) packages cream cheese, softened
 1 (14-ounce) can Sweetened Condensed Milk (NOT evaporated milk)
 4 eggs
 1 (6-ounce) package white chocolate baking squares, melted
 2 teaspoons vanilla extract, divided
 1 (21-ounce) can cherry pie filling
 Whipped cream or topping

Reserve 5 pecan halves for garnish. Finely chop and toast remaining pecan halves.

Preheat oven to 300°F. Mix crumbs, chopped pecan halves, sugar and melted margarine or butter; press firmly on bottom of 9-inch springform pan.

Beat cream cheese in large bowl with mixer at medium speed until fluffy. Gradually beat in sweetened condensed milk until smooth. Blend in eggs, melted chocolate and 1 teaspoon vanilla. Pour into prepared pan.

Bake 1 hour or until center is set. Cool completely at room temperature. Refrigerate for at least 4 hours.

Mix cherry pie filling and remaining vanilla. Remove side of springform pan. Spoon cherry mixture over cheesecake. Garnish with dollops of whipped cream or topping around edge and reserved pecan halves. Cut into wedges to serve. Refrigerate leftovers.

Makes one 9-inch cheesecake.



BRIE TORTE

1 (15- to 16-ounce) wheel Brie
6 tablespoons butter, softened
1/3 cup chopped dried tart cherries
1/4 cup finely chopped pecans
1/2 teaspoon dried thyme (or 2 teaspoons finely chopped fresh thyme)

Refrigerate Brie until chilled and firm; or freeze 30 minutes, or until firm. Cut Brie in half horizontally.

Combine butter, cherries, pecans and thyme in a small bowl; mix well. Evenly spread mixture on cut-side of one piece of the Brie. Top with the other piece, cut-side down. Lightly press together. Wrap in plastic wrap; refrigerate 1 to 2 hours. To serve, cut into serving size wedges and bring to room temperature. Serve with crackers.

Makes about 20 appetizer servings.



SQUASH BAKE

2 acorn squash
1/4 cup butter or margarine, melted
1/2 cup dried tart cherries
1/4 cup chopped pecans
3 tablespoons firmly packed light brown sugar
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

Cut each acorn squash in half. Remove seeds and fiber. Place cut side down in baking pan with small amount of water in bottom. Bake in a 350-degree oven 45 to 50 minutes or until squash is tender and can be pierced with a fork. (Or place squash cut side down in a microwave-safe container. Add a little water. Microwave on High (100% power) 5 to 7 minutes, turning dish once. Continue cooking, if necessary, until squash is tender.)

Meanwhile, combine butter, cherries, pecans, brown sugar and cinnamon. Heat on top of stove or in microwave oven until butter melts. Fill center of each squash half with one-quarter of the cherry mixture. Mix some of the cooked squash with the cherry filling. Serve immediately. Makes 4 servings.

TART CHERRY A HEALTHY CHOICE

~ Cherries have pleased the palates of food lovers for centuries. Ongoing research shows that cherries are a rich source of antioxidants that can help fight cancer and heart disease. In addition, cherries contain compounds that help relieve the pain of arthritis, gout and even headaches.

~ Twenty cherries provide 25 milligrams of anthocyanins, which help to shut down the enzymes that cause tissue inflammation.

~ Montmorency tart cherries are available at retail stores, including selected supermarkets, specialty food stores, health food stores and farm markets all year long. To find a location or mail order source please visit www.usacheries.com.