



Culinary Craftwork

Newsletter: November 2010

Intimate Holiday Dining

A sumptuous and festive Thanksgiving feast for six or less with plenty of do-aheads.

News from Culinary Craftwork—

I'm working with a social media specialist to set up a presence on Facebook and Twitter. It's my goal to have an ongoing forum on Facebook where I can interact with my readers and clients, addressing comments and questions.

This issue of the newsletter focuses on a few of my favorite holiday recipes: **Roast Pork Loin with Spiced Apple-Cranberry Filling (Page 3)**; **Holiday Sweet Potatoes & Pears (Page 5)**; **Spinach & Cheese Timbale (Page 7)**; and **Bourbon-Pecan Tart (Page 9)**.

Culinary Craftwork specializes in offering private, semi-private, and group cooking classes. Some of you may remember me from when I taught cooking classes at Williams-Sonoma in Los Gatos. I am grateful to all of you who encouraged me to branch out on my own!

The Culinary Craftwork experience is different in that the classes I offer are fully customizable to what you want. I teach the classes in your own home at a time that is convenient for you. And I do all the shopping.

It is my mission to give you the tools you need to prepare meals that will seduce you with savor and wow your guests.

My website contains many sample menus that focus on building different skills, but I am happy to partner with you and come up with something new. The classes are fun, informal, and informative — and you get to eat!

The Culinary Craftwork newsletter is a monthly publication that focuses on seasonal fare with recipes and pictures. My newsletter also includes a section called "Ask the Chef," so please don't be shy—email me with your questions, and check out my page on Facebook.



Professional In-home Cooking Classes

Culinary Craftwork offers professionally taught in-home cooking classes by a chef with over 20 years' experience in restaurants and catering.

The classes are designed to build basic skills and boost confidence in the kitchen. I teach the classes in your own home, offer themed menus, cooking class parties and catered dinner parties.

Full class descriptions and prices are available on my website.

Alyssa Salwen, Chef
Alyssa@CulinaryCraftwork.com
Cell: (408) 429-0999
Office: (408) 372-2074

Visit me on the web

www.CulinaryCraftwork.com

Culinary Craftwork Offers Professionally Taught In-Home Cooking Classes, Cooking Class Parties & Catered Dinner Parties.

Alyssa Salwen | Web www.CulinaryCraftwork.com | Email Alyssa@CulinaryCraftwork.com | Cell (408) 429-0999 | Office (408) 372-2074

Use a heavy duty Ziploc bag to brine meats.



Use a heavy duty Ziploc bag to brine meats and poultry. It is not necessary to purchase brining bags. Just make sure to put the bag inside another container in your refrigerator in case the bag leaks.



Fall is my favorite time of year, not because of the holiday season, but in spite of it. I love the cool, crisp days and the smell of wood smoke in the air, the bright yellow ginkgo trees and the dropping of the leaves. But it is also a bittersweet time as the holidays approach—friends and family are scattered hither and yon like the autumn leaves that crunch underfoot.

This issue of the newsletter highlights holiday comfort food on a smaller scale for more intimate gatherings—no 18-pound turkeys with stuffing and gravy to feed a crowd—just a handful of dishes that can be prepared easily with many do-ahead steps for two to six people. The recipes I have included are some of my own personal holiday favorites, which I will be serving this year. I love do-ahead dishes as they allow me to spend more time with my family and less time in the kitchen.

A Little About Brining

Last year at this time I devoted an issue to brining (see [“All About Brining”](#)). In this issue I revisit that technique with a brined pork loin roast stuffed with dried apples and cranberries. Pork loin is a lean cut of meat which can tend to be dry. Whether cooking pork chops or roasting a loin, the meat benefits from a salty-sweet bath, which adds moisture and enhances flavor. Here are some topics that were covered in last year’s newsletter:

- How long to brine different meat products
- Brine recipes to help you get started
- Tips for getting crispy skin on poultry

Regardless of whether you are serving a turkey or a pork loin roast, brining is an essential step in making the meat juicy and tender. Turkeys typically require at least 12 hours of brining, and it can be complicated to coordinate chilled storage space. Pork takes just a fraction of the time to brine. The brine I use is a simple one that can be applied for a mere 1–2 hours. More complex brines can contain herbs and spices, apple cider or even wine.

The pork loin can be brined, stuffed and rolled a day ahead of time, and takes just over an hour to roast. I’ve paired it with sweet, golden yams (actually sweet potatoes) whipped with pears and butter and a rich, cheesy spinach timbale, both of which can be assembled in advance and baked briefly after the pork has been roasted. For dessert I’ve included a recipe for a rich and buttery bourbon-pecan tart.

Culinary Craftwork Offers Professionally Taught In-Home Cooking Classes, Cooking Class Parties & Catered Dinner Parties.

Alyssa Salwen | Web www.CulinaryCraftwork.com | Email Alyssa@CulinaryCraftwork.com | Cell (408) 429-0999 | Office (408) 372-2074

Roast Pork Loin with Spiced Apple-Cranberry Filling

3



This recipe is adapted from one of the recipes featured on America's Test Kitchen and is best prepared with a loin that is 7 to 8 inches long and 4 to 5 inches wide. To make cutting the pork easier, **freeze it for 30 minutes to firm up the meat**. If mustard seeds are unavailable, stir an equal amount of whole-grain mustard into the filling after the apples have been processed. The pork loin can be stuffed, rolled and tied a day ahead of time, but don't season the exterior until you are ready to roast. Take the meat out of the refrigerator an hour before roasting.

Roast Pork Loin with Spiced Apple-Cranberry Filling

Serves 6

Ingredients

Pork

- 2 ½ lb. boneless center-cut pork loin roast
- ¼ cup kosher salt
- ¼ cup sugar
- 4 cups cold water

Filling

- 1 ½ cups apple cider or fresh apple juice
- ½ cup cider vinegar
- ¼ cup packed, light brown sugar
- 1 large shallot, halved lengthwise and sliced thin crosswise
- 4 oz. dried apples
- 2 ½ oz. dried cranberries
- 1 Tbs. minced crystallized ginger or fresh grated ginger
- 1 Tbs. yellow mustard seeds
- ½ tsp. ground allspice
- 1/8 tsp. cayenne pepper

(Continued on page 4)

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

How to butterfly a pork loin.



Step 1. Make a ½-inch horizontal cut from the bottom of the roast, stopping ½-inch before the edge. Open the flap.



Step 2. Cut through the thicker half of the roast about ½-inch from bottom, stopping ½-inch before the edge. Open this flap.



Step 3. Repeat until pork loin is an even ½-inch in thickness. Open up the flaps. If uneven, cover with plastic wrap and use a meat pounder to even out.

Culinary Craftwork Offers Professionally Taught In-Home Cooking Classes, Cooking Class Parties & Catered Dinner Parties.

Alyssa Salwen | Web www.CulinaryCraftwork.com | Email Alyssa@CulinaryCraftwork.com | Cell (408) 429-0999 | Office (408) 372-2074

Filling and Rolling the Pork Loin.



Step 4. Make the filling. Chill before using.



Step 5. Spread the filling over the pork loin, leaving a ½-inch border.



Step 6. Starting from the short side, roll pork loin tightly.



Step 7. Tie roast with cooking twine at 1-inch intervals.

Roast Pork Loin with Spiced Apple-Cranberry Filling (Cont.)

Directions

1. Make the brine. Combine the water, salt and sugar. Mix well. **Following steps 1-3 on the previous page, butterfly the meat to an even ½-inch thickness.** Place the pork in a Ziploc bag and pour in the brine. Let marinate for 1–2 hours. Drain and pat dry. Meanwhile, make the apple-cranberry filling.
2. Bring the remaining ingredients to a simmer in a medium saucepan over medium-heat heat. Cover, reduce heat to low, and cook until the apples are very soft, about 20 minutes.
3. Push mixture through a fine-mesh strainer to extract as much liquid as possible. Return liquid to saucepan and simmer over medium-high heat until reduced to about ½ cup and thick; reserve for glaze.
4. Pulse apple mixture in food processor until uniformly coarsely chopped, about fifteen pulses. Transfer filling to bowl and refrigerate till cold.
5. Season the interior of the pork loin liberally with salt and spread apple filling in even layer, leaving a ½-inch border (see illustration at left, Step 5.). Roll tightly and tie with twine at 1-inch intervals . Season exterior liberally with salt and pepper.
6. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Heat a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add 1 Tbs. olive oil and 1 Tbs. butter. When the butter stops foaming, place the roast in the pan and sear on all sides until golden brown.
7. Transfer to a rack set over a roasting pan. Roast the pork loin in the oven for 55–65 minutes, until an instant-read thermometer reads 130–135°F. Brush the roast with the reserved glaze (save remaining glaze to pass at the table). You may need to reheat glaze briefly to make it spreadable. Continue to roast until glaze is glossy and sticky, about 5 minutes longer.
8. Transfer roast to cutting board, loosely tent with foil, and let rest for 15 minutes. The internal temperature should rise to about 145°F. Cut into ½-inch thick slices, removing twine as you cut. Serve immediately.

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

Holiday Sweet Potatoes & Pears



For this recipe, I use white or golden sweet potatoes, which are starchier than red or orange sweet potatoes. The pears lend a subtle sweetness, and the cinnamon is just enough to bring out the flavors without turning the dish into a dessert. My husband loves this recipe and calls it "Christmas on a spoon." Although most stores label them as yams, they are all in fact sweet potatoes. Yams are a large, often hairy, starchy root vegetable usually found in ethnic markets.

Holiday Sweet Potatoes & Pears

Ingredients

- 3 pounds sweet potatoes (yams)
- 1 stick unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 2 large ripe Bartlett or Bosc pears, peeled, cored, sliced
- 3/4 cup (or more) pear nectar
- 2 Tbs. light brown sugar
- Salt to taste (pepper optional)
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/8 teaspoon (generous) ground cardamom

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 375° F. Butter a glass baking dish or casserole. Pierce potatoes in several places with fork. Place on baking sheet; bake until very tender when pierced with knife, about 1 hour to an hour and a half. Remove from oven. Reduce temperature to 350°.

(Continued on page 6)

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

5

Sweet Potatoes & Yams



Sweet Potatoes

Typically, when you go shopping you see the above root vegetables labeled as yams; in fact they are almost all sweet potatoes of one sort or another.

They may have white, golden, orange or even purple flesh. True yams tend to be larger and somewhat hairy. You can find them in Asian and Hispanic groceries. See photo below.



Yams

Culinary Craftwork Offers Professionally Taught In-Home Cooking Classes, Cooking Class Parties & Catered Dinner Parties.

Alyssa Salwen | Web www.CulinaryCraftwork.com | Email Alyssa@CulinaryCraftwork.com | Cell (408) 429-0999 | Office (408) 372-2074

Butter is love!



What's the secret to truly scrumptious whipped sweet potatoes? Butter.

I've heard it said that "Butter is love." I'm sure Julia Child would agree. In the interests of health, many people might want to reduce the amount of butter in this recipe, but doing so would definitely impact the dish in a negative way. Don't waste time feeling guilty. Go ahead and splurge for the holidays!

Holiday Sweet Potatoes & Pears (Cont.)

2. Meanwhile, melt 2 tablespoons butter in heavy large skillet over medium-high heat. Add pears; sauté until beginning to soften, about 5 minutes. Add 3/4 cup pear nectar, cinnamon, cardamom and 2 Tbs. brown sugar; bring to simmer. Reduce heat to medium-low; cover and simmer until pears are very tender, adding more nectar if mixture sticks to skillet and stirring often till liquid is mostly evaporated. Transfer to food processor and chop coarsely.
3. Peel sweet potatoes; place in food processor or electric mixer. Add 4–6 tablespoons butter; process until smooth, adding additional pear nectar if needed to adjust consistency. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Transfer to prepared baking dish (Can be prepared 1 day ahead. Cover and chill).
4. Bake the sweet potato puree, uncovered, until heated through and serve.

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

Spinach & Cheese Timbales



Timbales are usually baked in individual molds or ramekins, though there is a wide, shallow dish that is also called a timbale. They may have different vegetable fillings and are similar to a mousse or soufflé, though not as light. Basically, they are like a dense, crustless quiche. These timbales are quick and easy to prepare. Don't be tempted to leave out the anchovies; they add a subtle seasoning note. The key to the success of the following recipe is to blanch the spinach and squeeze out as much water as possible, so that the filling remains thick and rich.

Spinach & Cheese Timbales

Serves 4

Ingredients

- 6 oz. fresh baby spinach
- ¼ cup sliced scallions or minced shallots
- 1 clove minced garlic
- 1 ½ Tbs. butter
- 1 cup whole-milk ricotta cheese
- 2 large eggs
- 1/3 cup whipping cream
- 2 oz. shredded aged gruyere cheese
- 1 Tbs. grated parmesan cheese + extra for sprinkling on top
- 2 canned anchovies, rinsed and patted dry
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1 pinch of grated nutmeg

(Continued on page 8)

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

Individual Ramekins



Use 5- or 6-oz. ramekins for individual servings, or a medium soufflé dish for one large timbale (you will need to double the cooking time).

For best results, use tender, pre-washed baby spinach.



For the sake of convenience I recommend using pre-washed baby spinach. It is tender and never gritty. It is also available in 6-oz bags—just the size that is needed for this recipe.

Spinach & Cheese Timbales (Cont.)

Directions

1. In a 5- to 6-quart pot over high heat, bring about 2 quarts water to a boil. Add the spinach and cook until wilted, 1 to 2 minutes. Drain and rinse under cold water until cool. Squeeze or roll spinach tightly in a kitchen towel to remove as much water as possible.
2. In a small skillet, heat 1½ Tbs. butter and add the scallions; cook for a minute until softened. Let cool.
3. In a food processor, whirl spinach, scallions, ricotta, eggs, cream, cheese, anchovies, salt, pepper, and nutmeg until well blended. Pour mixture into a buttered 5 or 6-oz. individual ramekins.
4. Bake on the middle rack of a 375° oven for 20–25 minutes, till puffed and just set.

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

Bourbon-Pecan Tart



There is little real difference between a pecan pie and a pecan tart. The following recipe is a classic, which can be baked in a tart pan or a quiche pan with scalloped edges. It is shallower than a pecan pie with a higher ratio of pecans to delicious, gooey filling. When pre-baking the tart shell, be careful not to let the edges burn.

Bourbon-Pecan Tart

Serves 8-10

Ingredients

- 3 large eggs
- 1/2 cup (packed) golden brown sugar
- 3/4 cup dark corn syrup
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 2 tablespoons bourbon
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 cups pecan halves or pieces
- 1 Recipe Pâte Brisée (shortcrust pastry)

Directions

Place crust in a 10-inch tart pan with removable bottom; press crust into pan. Trim overhang. Chill crust 30 minutes, in freezer, preferably.

Preheat oven to 375°F. Line crust with foil or parchment paper; fill with dried beans. Bake until crust is set and pale golden, about 30 minutes. Remove foil and beans. Bake crust until golden brown, about 10 minutes. Place pan with crust on rimmed baking sheet.

Meanwhile, using electric mixer, beat eggs and sugar in medium bowl. Beat in corn syrup. Add butter, bourbon, vanilla, and salt; beat until blended. Stir in pecans.

Pour pecan filling into hot crust. Bake until center of filling is set, about 25 minutes. Cool tart on rack for 1 hour; remove pan sides. Serve slightly warm or at room temperature.

(Continued on page 10)

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

9

Use a moderately priced Kentucky bourbon, such as Jim Beam, for good flavor.



If you don't have bourbon, you can use a dark rum instead.



Pecan halves make for a nice presentation and may be fresher and more moist than pecan pieces, which are considerably less expensive.

Culinary Craftwork Offers Professionally Taught In-Home Cooking Classes, Cooking Class Parties & Catered Dinner Parties.

Alyssa Salwen | Web www.CulinaryCraftwork.com | Email Alyssa@CulinaryCraftwork.com | Cell (408) 429-0999 | Office (408) 372-2074

Flaky, buttery tart pastry is easy to make.



This pastry can be made in just minutes using a food processor. If you don't have a food processor, you can use a mixer or cut in the butter by hand and use two forks to combine with water.

The key is to work quickly and handle the dough minimally.

Pâte Brisée (shortcrust pastry)

Ingredients

- 1 ½ cups all-purpose flour (I like King Arthur flour)
- 12 Tbs. (6 oz.) cold, sweet butter, cut into Tbs. sized pieces
- ¼ tsp salt
- Approx. 2 Tbs. ice water

Directions

Place the flour, butter and salt in the bowl of the food processor. Pulse about 10 times until the butter is pea-sized, and dough has a coarse 'cornmeal' texture.

Add the water then pulse until the dough just begins to come together.

Turn out dough onto a lightly floured pastry mat. Form a ball and squeeze together. Wrap dough in plastic wrap; press down to form a disk. Refrigerate for about 15 minutes until the glutens have rested and the butter is chilled.

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

Snap Review: AQUI Cal-Mex

11

This restaurant has several branches, including Campbell, Willow Glen, Blossom Hill and Cupertino. The following remarks pertain to the Campbell location, as I have not visited any of the other restaurants.

Aqui is not really a Mexican restaurant; rather it is a multi-cultural melting pot of mostly good food at exceptionally reasonable prices. All entrees are under \$10. Like the Sonoma Chicken Coop (see Snap Review in the [October Newsletter](#)), AQUI is a self-service joint. You order at the counter and retrieve your food when your electronic pager goes off. This saves both the restaurant and its patrons money.

As the menu at AQUI is very large, I cannot do the restaurant justice in all areas. Naturally, they have an assortment of updated tacos, burritos and quesadillas, with non-traditional fillings, such as Thai Carnitas and salmon. The restaurant is very family friendly with a kids' menu and a vegetarian section.

While not every dish thrills, almost everything I've had at AQUI has been fresh and tasty.

Some of my favorite dishes include the chicken flautas, chicken enchiladas, natural pork chile verde and pork vindaloo (a special with Indian spices). Stewed dishes, such as the pork and Angus beef, are gently simmered till fork-tender.

One thing that sets this restaurant apart is the quality of their margaritas, which are made from freshly squeezed juices and good tequila. At \$8 for a top-shelf margarita, AQUI is a bargain. Both the Orange Agave and the Carlito's Cadillac are definitely worth the extra cash. They also feature the "Industrial strength" frozen margarita from a machine, which is a kicker.

Even the desserts at AQUI are good. There are few selections, and they rotate seasonally. The tres leches cake with fresh strawberries and real whipped cream is a winner (but consider sharing, as the portion is large!) Pumpkin cheesecake is dense and not overly sweet. All in all, I give AQUI four stars. Definitely worth a try!



AQUI Cal-Mex in Campbell : 4 stars out of 5

[See what others have to say about AQUI Cal-Mex in Campbell on Yelp.](#)

AQUI Cal-Mex , Campbell



201 E. Campbell Ave.
Campbell, CA 95008

Phone: (408) 374-2784
Fax: (408) 374-4123

Culinary Craftwork Offers Professionally Taught In-Home Cooking Classes, Cooking Class Parties & Catered Dinner Parties.

Alyssa Salwen | Web www.CulinaryCraftwork.com | Email Alyssa@CulinaryCraftwork.com | Cell (408) 429-0999 | Office (408) 372-2074

Ask the Chef



I love hearing from people who have read the newsletter or taken one of my classes.

I enjoy the opportunity to answer your questions in this general forum, and I hope that my advice is helpful.

Please continue to send me your questions, comments and ideas. They really make my day. You can also find me on Facebook.

Thank you!

Alyssa

Ask the Chef (Q&A)

Freezing Left-Over Cream

Fran asks, "Sometimes a recipe calls for cream and I have some left over. Can I freeze it and reuse it?"

Reply: Left-over whipping cream or heavy cream can be frozen and used in dishes where the cream gets cooked; however, you can't use previously frozen cream to make whipped cream as it will be grainy. The graininess melts out of the cream when it is heated.

Shallots versus Red Onions

Matt asks, "In recipes that call for shallots, can I use red onion instead?"

Reply: Shallots have a unique, sweet flavor that is desirable in many dishes. In a pinch, you can use finely minced red onion or scallion whites, but I would encourage you to seek out shallots when possible. While shallots are more expensive than onions, their flavor is worth the extra money, especially in salad dressings and sauces.

An Easier Way of Peeling Garlic

Samantha asks, "Many recipes call for peeled garlic and recommend lightly smashing the cloves with the side of a knife, but what if you need to leave the garlic cloves whole and undamaged?"

Reply: Break apart the head of garlic and separate the cloves. Put them into a bowl of very warm water for five minutes, until the skins have softened. Starting at the root end, use a paring knife to remove the skin. It should come away easily in one piece.

Using a Remote Thermometer for Roasted Meats

Deb asks, "I have an instant-read thermometer that I use when roasting, but I have seen remote thermometers and am wondering whether I should get one?"

Reply: Instant-read thermometers are indispensable in the kitchen; however, I do own a remote thermometer (which doesn't get used very often).

I like to use the remote thermometer for roasts because you can set the alarm to ring when the specified temperature is reached. It is especially handy because you don't have to pierce the meat multiple times as it approaches the desired temperature. It is also handy to use a remote thermometer when entertaining, as it is easy to become distracted by company. Remote thermometers tend to run upwards of \$20, which makes them a pricey gadget, which may or may not get used very often.