



Culinary Craftwork Newsletter

Low-Stress Holiday Menus

This is the second newsletter from [Culinary Craftwork](#), a new company that 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 key aspect that makes Culinary Craftwork different from other cooking classes is that the classes are fully customizable to what the client wants. 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!

This issue of the newsletter focuses on two low-stress, do-ahead menus that are festive and delicious —perfect for the holidays.

The Culinary Craftwork newsletter is a monthly publication that focuses on seasonal fare with recipes and pictures. Future newsletters will also include a Q & A section, so please don't be shy—[email me](#), and I'll do my best to answer your questions and address any other issues that you may bring up.

I thank those of you who read my first newsletter and followed up by emailing me questions that I was able to answer. I look forward to hearing from you and researching new subjects for the newsletter.



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. Additionally, catered dinner parties and cooking class parties may be arranged.

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LOW-STRESS HOLIDAY MENUS

Tis the season for entertaining, and a great strategy for a relaxed and enjoyable holiday is organization and choosing dishes that can be prepared in advance. I know from experience that the more things can be prepared in advance, the less last-minute stress you will have. I'm a firm believer that the host should be able to sit down with their guests and enjoy the meal and good times, but all too often the host is left flustered and exhausted with too many last minute things to do.

When I married seven years ago, I looked forward to spending holidays with my new family. Very quickly, how-

ever, it became apparent that I would become the de facto chef for most events, even if they did not take place in our own home.

The foods I prepared had to be prepped in advance and be portable because I couldn't count on my in-laws having any of the equipment that was needed to prepare the food from scratch. To my shock, these people were used to eating pre-roasted turkeys from the grocery and side dishes from cans!

Little by little, I've been teaching by example—nothing fancy—just flavorful homemade food.

The secret for success with entertaining is to do as much as possible ahead of time. This will allow you to mingle with your guests and enjoy the holidays.

Serving Tip

Prepare the Mushroom Pâté and Crostini in Advance

Making the Crostini in advance will allow you to interact with your guests while focusing on the main dish. Serve at Room Temperature.

This issue of the newsletter includes two menus that are ambitious, delicious and easy to prepare in advance. In Menu 1 I offer a recipe for an appetizing boneless stuffed turkey breast, which cooks up in about an hour. The turkey can be brined the day before and the stuffing can also be prepared in advance and held in the refrigerator. The appetizer, side dish and dessert are also ideally suited for preparation in advance. The panna cotta benefits from being chilled overnight and can be served in variety of ways. While there are a fair number of steps, each of these recipes is easy to follow.

The second menu features a pork loin stuffed with apples and dried fruit. Once again, the pork loin and stuffing can be prepared in advance. This menu includes a trio of vegetables (butternut squash, sweet potato, and celeriac) which makes a delicious and colorful side dish. The vegetables can be cut up the day before (except for the celeriac) and bagged until ready to roast. The meal finishes with a twist on the classic French upside-down apple tart; in this case caramelized pears replace the apples.

Menu 1

Golden Crostini with Mushroom & Sun-dried Tomato Pâté (Page 3)

Rolled Stuffed Turkey Breast with Fennel and Focaccia stuffing (Pages 4-5)

Braised Cipollini onions with Pancetta & Balsamic Vinegar (Pages 5-6)

Panna Cotta with Fresh Berries and Raspberry coulis (Pages 6-7)

Menu 2

Hearts of Romaine with Lemon Dressing & Crumbled Gorgonzola Dolcelatte (Page 8)

Apple stuffed Pork Loin with Cider Gravy (Pages 8-9)

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Menu 1

Golden Crostini with Mushroom & Sun-dried Tomato Pâté



Use any combination of fresh mushrooms as long as the total weight is 1 lb. Both the crostini and mushroom spread can be made ahead, which makes this a perfect recipe for the busy holiday season or anytime you're entertaining. Crostini are crispy golden toasts perfect for dips and spreads. The following recipe yields approximately 24 crostini.

Ingredients

For the crostini:

- ½ cup olive oil
- 24 slices coarse country bread, each about ½ inch thick and 3 inches in diameter
- 1 garlic clove, halved

For the mushroom spread:

- 5 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ lb. fresh white button mushrooms, brushed clean and chopped
- ¼ lb. fresh cremini mushrooms, brushed clean and chopped
- ¼ lb. fresh shiitake mushrooms, brushed clean, stems discarded and caps chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 2 Tbs. finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley, plus whole leaves for garnish (optional)
- 2 tsp. fresh thyme leaves or 1/2 tsp. dried thyme
- ½ tsp. minced fresh rosemary
- 1 tsp. coarse salt plus salt, to taste
- Freshly ground pepper, to taste
- ¼ cup drained, oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, finely chopped, plus sun-dried tomato slivers for garnish (optional)
- ¼ cup grated parmesan cheese

Directions

Preheat the oven to 350°F. To make the crostini, lightly brush olive oil on both sides of each bread slice. Arrange the bread in a single layer on a baking sheet. Bake until the crostini are golden on the edges, about 25 minutes. Remove from the oven and let cool slightly. Using the cut side of the garlic, lightly rub one side over each slice of bread. Set aside. The crostini can be made up to 1 week ahead and stored in an airtight container.

To make the mushroom spread, heat 2 Tbs. of the olive oil in a large fry pan over medium-high heat. Add all the mushrooms and cook, stirring often, until lightly browned, about 10 minutes. Add the garlic, chopped parsley, thyme, rosemary, 1 tsp. salt and pepper. Cook, stirring, for 2 minutes more.

Transfer the mushroom mixture to a food processor. Process until very finely chopped. With the processor running, add the remaining 3 Tbs. olive oil in a thin, steady stream, processing until the mixture is smooth and spreadable. Stir in the chopped sun-dried tomatoes and pulse to blend. Season to taste. The mushroom spread can be made up to 1 day ahead. Bring to room temperature before serving. Spread mushroom pâté on the crostini and sprinkle with grated parmesan cheese.



Cooking Tip

Use a Food Processor

Chop the raw mushrooms in a food processor, but take care not to puree them; mushrooms release a lot of water as they cook. Sauté the mushrooms until nicely browned; once they're cooked, you'll return them to the food processor and pulse the machine until they have a uniformly fine texture.



Cooking Tip

Brine the Turkey Breast

If you are unable to find brining bags, a heavy-duty Ziploc bag may be used in its place. There are now jumbo sized Ziploc bags that are perfect for whole chickens, small turkeys and pork chops.

Ingredients for brine:

- 1 ¼ cups Kosher salt
- ¾ cup firmly packed brown sugar
- 1 tsp. peppercorns, lightly crushed
- 1 bay leaf, torn in 3 pieces
- 3 qt. water

Brining bag or an extra large Ziploc bag

Directions:

In a large pot combine the salt, brown sugar, peppercorns and 1 qt of the water. Bring to a boil over high heat and continue boiling until the sugar and salt have dissolved. Transfer to a bowl or other container and let cool to lukewarm. Then add the remaining 2 qt. cold water.

Place the boneless, butterflied turkey breast in a brining bag, pour in the brine and let marinate in the refrigerator for 4-6 hours. Remove the turkey from the bag and rinse well under cold water. Discard the brine (brine should never be reused).

To learn more about brining [click here](#)



Stuffed Turkey Breast with Fennel & Focaccia

Ingredients

- ½ stick of butter
- 1 cup of diced yellow onion
- 1 cup of diced celery
- 1 fennel bulb, trimmed and diced (save fennel greens for garnish)
- 1 egg
- 2-3 Tbs. mixed fresh herbs (thyme, sage, parsley)
- ½ box of focaccia stuffing mix (or 1 qt. homemade dried stuffing made from focaccia cut into 1-inch cubes)
- 2 cups of chicken broth (preferably Swanson's 'Natural Goodness')
- ½ stick of butter
- 2 boneless turkey breast halves, butterflied & pounded lightly to an even thickness

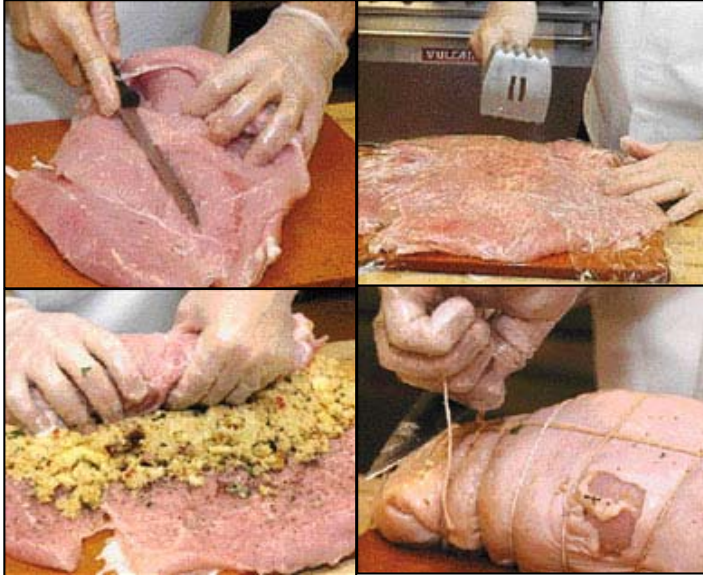
Directions

In a large saucepan, melt ½ stick of butter. Add the onion, celery and fennel; sauté, stirring occasionally, until soft and translucent, about 10 minutes. Bring the chicken broth to a boil with the remaining ½ stick of butter. Combine with the vegetables and stuffing mix. Add the fresh herbs and season well. Beat the egg with a fork and add it to the stuffing mix. The stuffing should clump together; if it seems too wet after a few minutes, add a little more bread. If it seems dry and doesn't clump, add a little more chicken broth.

Remove the turkey breast from the brine and pat it dry with paper towels. Place one butterflied turkey breast on a work surface, with the long side nearest you. Season it with salt and freshly ground pepper. Mound half of the stuffing in the center, leaving a 1-inch border on each long side. Fold the long side nearest you over the stuffing to enclose, gently pressing the turkey into a cylinder. Using kitchen twine, tie the rolled turkey breast crosswise at 1-inch intervals. Season the outside of the turkey with salt and pepper. Repeat the process with the other turkey breast.

STUFFED TURKEY BREAST WITH FENNEL & FOCACCIA

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees. Heat a large skillet and add enough olive oil to cover the bottom of the pan. When the oil begins to shimmer, place the turkey breast in the pan and lightly brown it on all sides. Remove the turkey breast and



place it on a rack inside a roasting pan. Place the turkey in the oven and roast for 25 minutes; then turn down the oven temperature to 350 degrees. Continue roasting for about half an hour more, until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the turkey registers 170 degrees.

Let the turkey breasts rest under a tent of aluminum foil for about 10 minutes before slicing. Serve with braised cipollini onions.

Braised Cipollini Onions with Balsamic Vinegar & Pancetta



A little internet research revealed that Modena's aceto balsamico dates back at least to the 11th century, when a written record reports the delivery of a barrel of the extraordinary vinegar to Emperor Henry III as a coronation gift. For centuries, the aceto was made by the local families only for their own use, with the barrels often a prized inclusion in a young woman's dowry.



Food Safety Tip

Wear Gloves

Wear nitrile or latex gloves when handling the turkey or pork. That way the meat juices and stuffing won't get lodged under your fingernails. Clean your work space with a combination of hot water and bleach to kill any bacteria. This will help prevent salmonella.



Shopping Tip

Select firm and tight cipollini onions.

These sweet little onions are different from shallots in both shape and flavor. They can be found at most of the better quality grocery stores. Make sure that the onions are firm to the touch and have tightly wrapped skins.



Shopping Tip

Select a plump, moist vanilla bean, or use vanilla bean paste.

Vanilla bean paste is available at Williams-Sonoma and some Nob Hill grocery stores.

BRAISED CIPOLLINI ONIONS WITH BALSAMIC VINEGAR & PANCETTA

Here, the aromatic vinegar is combined with sugar to create a rich sweet-and-sour brown glaze for the small, squat onions. Serve warm for the best flavor as an accompaniment to roast pork or turkey.

Ingredients

2 lb. cipollini onions
 2 cups meat stock or beef broth
 4 Tbs. (½ stick) unsalted butter
 ¼ cup balsamic vinegar
 1 Tbs. sugar
 Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste
 ¼ cup diced pancetta (optional)

Directions

Bring a large saucepan three-quarters full of water to a boil over high heat. Add the onions and cook for 30 seconds. Drain and place under cold running water to halt the cooking. Drain again. Using a small, sharp knife, trim off the root ends and slip off the skins. Do not cut the onions too deeply or they will fall apart.

In a large, heavy skillet over medium heat, combine the onions, pancetta, stock and butter. Cover and cook, stirring occasionally, until the onions are partially cooked, about 20 minutes.

Uncover the pan and stir in the vinegar, sugar, salt and pepper. Reduce the heat to low and cook, uncovered, shaking the pan occasionally, until the onions are very tender when pierced with a fork, about 20 minutes. Add a little warm water if needed to keep the onions moist.

Transfer to a serving dish. The recipe can be made in advance and re-warmed.

Panna Cotta with Raspberry Coulis



Panna Cotta means cooked cream; essentially it is an eggless custard enriched with vanilla bean. It is held together with a small amount of gelatin and must be made ahead in order for the individual portions to hold their shape when unmolded — a minimum of 4 hours in the refrigerator — overnight is ideal.

PANNA COTTA WITH RASPBERRY COULIS

Ingredients

2 Tbs. water
4 tsp. gelatin
5 cups heavy cream
1 cup milk
A pinch of salt
1-inch strip of lemon peel
1 cup of extra fine sugar
1 vanilla bean, split

Directions

Place 2 Tbs. of water in a small bowl. Sprinkle the gelatin over the water. Let stand until softened, about 10 minutes.

Mix the cream, milk, lemon peel and sugar in a large, heavy saucepan. Scrape in the seeds of the vanilla bean and add the bean as well. Bring to a boil slowly, stirring frequently. Remove from heat and add the gelatin mixture; let it dissolve. Remove the vanilla bean and lemon peel. Transfer mixture to a bowl and set the bowl over another bowl filled with ice water. Let stand just until cool, stirring occasionally.

Divide the cream mixture between six 10-oz. custard cups, ramekins or glasses. Cover and refrigerate overnight. Unmold the custard onto plates and drizzle with the raspberry coulis. Garnish with fresh berries in season.

RASPBERRY COULIS

Ingredients

2 ½ cups frozen raspberries, thawed
¼ cup sugar
Juice of ½ lemon

Directions

Puree the ingredients in a blender. Adjust the sugar to taste. Strain the coulis through a sieve, pressing down hard on the solids to catch the seeds. Scrape the bottom of the sieve to capture all of the coulis.



Plating Tip

Serve in Glasses

Panna cotta is usually served unmolded onto a plate; when serving large numbers of guests, you can pour the panna cotta into serving glasses, goblets or parfait glasses. Refrigerate as before, then top with raspberry coulis and fresh berries.



Shopping Tip

Use Substitutes When Necessary

Gorgonzola dolce latte (literally, sweet milk) is soft blue cheese that can be found in the better grocery stores, such as Whole Foods.

Cambozola is another soft blue cheese that is more widely available and makes a fine substitute if you can't find the gorgonzola.

Menu 2

Hearts of Romaine with Lemon Dressing & Crumbled Gorgonzola Dolcelatte

Wash the romaine and separate out the crunchy inner leaves (the heart). Cut up the heart into fork-sized portions. Toss with Lemon dressing and garnish with crumbled gorgonzola dolce latte, or Cambozola cheese.

Ingredients for lemon dressing

½ cup fresh lemon juice
 1 Tbs. Dijon mustard
 ¾ cup olive oil (+/-)
 1 Tbs. minced shallots
 Salt & freshly ground pepper to taste

Cleaned Hearts of Romaine
 Gorgonzola dolce latte

This light and simple salad dressing can be made in advance and refrigerated. If refrigerated, let it come back to room temperature before whisking it again.

Directions

Whisk together the lemon juice, Dijon mustard, salt & pepper. Slowly whisk in the olive oil. Stir in the shallots. Taste and adjust seasoning. Add a little olive oil if the lemon juice is too sharp. Toss romaine with the dressing and sprinkle crumbled gorgonzola dolce latte over the top.

Apple-stuffed Pork Loin with Cider Sauce



APPLE-STUFFED PORK LOIN WITH CIDER SAUCE

APPLE CIDER BRINE FOR PORK

Ingredients

7 cups hot water
½ cup Kosher salt
2 cup apple cider concentrate
½ cup dark brown sugar
2 Tbs. cracked peppercorns
1 tsp. crushed allspice berries
2 bay leaves
4–6 lb. boneless pork loin, butterflied

Directions

Stir the hot water and salt together until the salt is dissolved. Add the apple cider concentrate, sugar and spices.

Cool the brine down in the refrigerator. Trim the pork loin well and submerge it in the brine for 6–8 hours, or overnight in the refrigerator.

Ingredients for Stuffing

2 Tbs. olive oil
1 ½ cups diced golden delicious apples
1 cup chopped onion
1 garlic clove, minced
½ cup dried cranberries or diced prunes
¼ cup golden raisins
½ tsp. chopped thyme
½ cup apple cider

Directions for Stuffing

In a large skillet over medium heat, warm the olive oil. Add the apple and onion and sauté until golden, about 5 minutes. Stir in the garlic and cook for a minute. Add the dried fruit, raisins and thyme. Season with salt and pepper; add the apple cider and boil, stirring occasionally, until the cider is absorbed by the stuffing. Let the stuffing cool.

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees and adjust the rack to the center position. Butterfly the pork loin by making a slit down its length, cutting just deep enough so that the loin opens up to lie flat like a book. Be careful not to cut all the way through the meat.

Spoon the stuffing evenly onto the meat. Close up the loin and tie it at even intervals so that it encases the stuffing completely. Sprinkle the surface of the loin with salt, pepper and fresh thyme. Place the loin in a baking pan and add ½ cup of the cider to the pan. Roast the loin for 30 minutes. Baste with the pan juices. Add the remaining cider to the pan. Continue to roast, basting at least twice with the pan juices until the meat is firm to the touch and an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the meat registers 145 degrees (about 40 minutes more).

Transfer the loin to a cutting board and cover loosely with foil. Scrape the pan bottom to dislodge any remaining bits, then pour the pan juices into a measuring pitcher. Add more cider as needed to measure 1 ½ cups total. In a small saucepan, combine ¼ cup of the pan juices and the cornstarch, and stir until the cornstarch is dissolved. Then add the remaining pan juices. Bring to a boil over medium heat and cook, stirring, until the sauce is slightly thickened. Taste and adjust seasoning.



Brining Tip

Use a Brining Bag

Use a brining bag or heavy duty Ziploc bag to enclose the pork. Place the bag in a bowl or over a plate in case the bag leaks. Give the bag a turn every so often, so that the brine penetrates the meat evenly.

To learn more about brining [click here](#).



Cooking Tip

Use Parchment Paper

Line the baking sheet with parchment paper. This will help keep the vegetables from sticking and allow a golden crust to form around the edges. It also helps with clean-up! Parchment paper can be found in most groceries in the foil and plastic wrap section.

Cooking Tip

Caramelizing the Pears

Caramelize the fruit to a deep amber color and gently transfer each pear quarter to a pyrex baking dish.

Roasted Squash, Sweet Potatoes & Celeriac



Roasted vegetables make a delicious “comfort food” as the roasting process brings out the natural sugars in them. I like to roast shiitake mushrooms and asparagus as well.

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Cut up equal portions of peeled butternut squash, sweet potatoes or yams, and celeriac. Place in a bowl and toss with olive oil, salt and pepper.

Turn out vegetables onto a half-sheet pan or other baking dish. Place in the oven and roast for about ½ hour (test to see if veggies are tender). Roast till golden brown around the edges. Use a spatula to dislodge any pieces that are stuck to the pan. Taste and adjust seasoning as necessary.

Pear Tart Tatin (Caramelized Upside-down Pear Tart)

Tart Tatin is usually made with apples and is one of my all-time favorite desserts. It is rich and dark with the caramelized fruit appearing right side up. Pears work wonderfully as well (but don't use Bartlett or Anjou pears – they are too soft and juicy to caramelize properly). Serve the tart with vanilla bean ice cream or lightly whipped heavy cream.



PEAR TART TATIN (CARAMELIZED UPSIDE-DOWN PEAR TART)

Use a 9–10" Pyrex pie pan and preheat oven to 450 degrees.

Ingredients

8 Bosc pears
1 stick of sweet, unsalted butter
1 cup of sugar
1 egg, beaten with a little water, milk or cream

Directions

Peel and slice the pears into halves; core the pears with a melon baller, then slice each half in half.

Melt the butter in one large sauté pan or two medium sauté pans over high heat. Add the pears and the sugar. Shake and turn pears frequently until they are heavily caramelized.

Arrange the caramelized pears in concentric circles with the edges overlapping in the pan and let cool completely.

Roll out the dough to about 14" on a floured pastry mat or silicone mat. Roll the dough over the rolling pin and place it over the pears. Cut off the extra dough and prick the tart with a small, sharp paring knife to let out steam. Fold over the edges and crimp tightly. Brush with the egg glaze.

Bake tart on the middle shelf of the oven for about 20 minutes. Drop the temperature to 400 degrees and continue baking until crust is lightly browned and firm.

Let the tart rest for about 15 minutes, then flip it over and unmold onto a heat-proof platter.

Flaky Tart Pastry

This recipe for tart pastry is also known as *pâte brisée*. It is a very buttery, flaky dough.

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. 2–3 Tbs. ice water
1 egg beaten with a little water or milk (egg glaze to brush on top of tart)

Directions

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

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

Turn the dough out onto a pastry mat. Form it into a ball and squeeze together. Wrap dough in plastic wrap; press down to form a disk. Press around the edges with the heel of your hand to create a smooth edge that will not crack apart when the dough is rolled out. Refrigerate the dough for about 15 minutes until the glens have rested and the butter is chilled.

Cooking Tip

Prepare Dough In Advance

You can make the dough in advance, but don't attempt to roll out the dough if it is too cold. Let it rest on the countertop till pliable. Use the plastic wrap to seal in the cracked edges. Remove the plastic wrap completely when you are ready to roll out the dough.

Gather up the scraps after rolling out and trimming the dough; sprinkle with sugar and cinnamon or grated parmesan and make twists. Bake the twists for 10 minutes or so until golden. Your nose will probably tell you when these delicious little treats are done.



Happy Holidays!

Culinary Craftwork

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

Find us on the Web:
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