

GRANDTOUR

Food

FUN AND EASY HOLIDAY PARTY FOODS!

By Gena Bell

THE HOLIDAYS ARE HERE, AND whether you celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanza or are just preparing yourself for the New Year, party planning is inevitable. And food is the key ingredient to party success. Some of us will put our best culinary hat on and cook for days in a disastrous kitchen and others will just drop by Costco or a high-end grocery and hope for the best. But whether you're planning a casual open house or an elaborate affair, party food can be easy, flavorful and fun.

Chilled or room temperature appetizers are a sure hit at most parties. Instead of the common cheese platter or sandwich tray, let's explore easy and fun foods to make. Cheese can be rolled, whipped or stuffed into exotic finger foods and served with incredible wines. You can easily stuff goat or Bleu cheese into grapes, olives or tomatoes and top with chopped roasted nuts. Or take your favorite soft cheese such as chive cream cheese, mix with pine nuts, roasted bell peppers, minced garlic and a dash of hot sauce and roll it into a Bibb lettuce leaf for a cool and crisp roll up. Another simple but flavorful cheese appetizer is sliced goat cheese topped with roasted garlic, orange zest, minced basil and mint with a sprinkle of sesame seeds. Serve with your favorite crackers or bread and pair with a Viognier or White Burgundy. Delish!

Another fun and easy party food that always make a holiday celebration special is delicately sliced Prosciutto wrapped around your favorite seasoned bread, veggie sticks or slices of melon. To serve, stack them upright in an elegant wine glass. Chilled Shrimp in Basil Ponzu Sauce is another elegant and easy party food. Serve in martini glasses and sprinkle with black sesame seeds. You can make it in five minutes!

Warm and elegant party foods can also be prepared with ease. Let's get the man of the house involved and have him fire up the grill to make his favorite pork ribs. But instead of serving a slab of meat, slice each rib individually and serve in your best chaffing dish. Add a twist to traditional Texas-style BBQ ribs with a zesty Chinese marinade using hoisin sauce, plum sauce, soy sauce, honey, minced ginger and a splash of red wine vinegar. These sauces can be found in the Asian section of your grocery store. You can even use this sauce on scallops or any type of fish and serve over wild rice.

Indian Satay (skewered meat or fish) is another fun and easy party food. Soak the meat or fish in any flavored marinade for two hours minimum. Pierce with a wooden skewer until threaded all the way down and grill or broil for two minutes per side. Serve warm or at room temperature. Salmon Satay is just delicious soaked in a Spicy Mustard-Rosemary Marinade and paired with a Pinot Noir.

Whether hot or cold, party foods can be fun and easy. To

play it safe, prepare something you already know how to make and then add a twist by changing the sauce or serving your food in a different way — smaller portions, fancy tooth picks or a silver chaffing dish. So celebrate this season with an elegant and easy affair featuring your favorite party foods!

CHILLED SHRIMP WITH BASIL PONZU SAUCE

1 pound raw medium to large shrimp
Basil Ponzu Sauce
2 tablespoons soy sauce
2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lime juice
2 tablespoons freshly squeezed orange juice
2 tablespoons light brown sugar
2 tablespoons olive oil
1/2 teaspoon Asian chile sauce
1 tablespoon minced ginger
1 clove fresh garlic minced
1/4 cup chopped fresh basil
1/4 cup black sesame seeds

Clean and devein shrimp. Bring four quarts of water to a boil. Add shrimp to water and cook shrimp until done, about one minute. Drain and add shrimp to a bowl of ice water to chill. When chilled, drain and refrigerate. In a small bowl, combine the sauce ingredients and mix well. To serve, toss the shrimp with the sauce and sprinkle with sesame seeds. Serve in your favorite martini glasses. Enjoy!

SPICY MUSTARD-ROSEMARY MARINADE

2 tablespoons minced rosemary leaves
4 cloves garlic, finely minced
1/3 cup Dijon mustard
1/3 dry white wine
1/3 cup freshly squeezed lemon juice
1/2 cup oyster sauce (Asian section)
1/4 cup honey
2 teaspoons hot sauce

Mix ingredients together. Pour over fish, chicken or beef and refrigerate at least two hours. Grill, broil or sauté. Enjoy! @T



Gena Bell is a food writer/consultant and a certified pastry chef and resides in the Newport Beach area.