

Festive Finger Food!

'Tis the Season to entertain and visit with family and friends and I have received so many requests for simple and quick appetizers. So, whether you need to take an appetizer to a party or to the office, or you have guests that stop by, or a party to give, or you're tailgating or watching the game with the gang, here are some 'appetizing' ideas for quick and easy Festive Finger Food!

First, take advantage of the wonderful appetizers made fresh at Jungle Jim's daily: Check out the Sushi Bar, the Olive Bar for all your Antipasto Platter ingredients, and the Deli section for everything from cheese balls to salsas to spreads to smoked sausages and cheeses galore --- how about flavored Hummus and Pita chips as well. The Cheese section offers an array of cheeses that are appetizers in themselves right next to the wine and beer --- what could be more convenient?!

Praline Kahlua Brie with Gingersnaps and Pears

1 13-15 oz. Brie cheese round (Baby Brie)
1/2 Cup Pecans, toasted and coarsely chopped
2 Tab. Kahlua (coffee flavored liqueur)*
2 Tab. Brown Sugar

Remove the Brie from the packaging. Slice the rind from the top of the cheese round and place on an oven or microwave-safe plate or dish. Combine the pecans, Kahlua, and brown sugar. Spoon over the top of the Brie. Bake at 350 degrees for 5 minutes or just until softened. Or microwave 45 seconds to 1 1/2 minutes, depending on microwave wattage. Serve with sliced pears or apples and your favorite gingersnap cookies. Can also serve with crackers.

*If you do not want to use the Kahlua, use 1/2 Cup Orange Marmalade in lieu of the Kahlua.

Christmas Goat Cheese Log with Rosemary

1/4 Cup Sun-dried Tomatoes with Herbs in Olive Oil, chopped
1 clove Garlic, minced
1 Tab. Fresh Rosemary, minced
1 Tsp. Extra Virgin Olive Oil
1 8-10 oz. Log of Goat Cheese
Sprigs of fresh Rosemary for garnish

Place log of Goat Cheese on dessert-size plate. Combine first four ingredients and spoon over the goat cheese. Garnish with a couple sprigs of rosemary and serve with crackers.

Christmas Crostinis with Merry Cheese Toppings

Here is where you can use your imagination and individual tastes. You can either buy crostini (Italian for 'little toasts' or make them. I like to use the Pan Cuban bread made fresh at the Jungle. Slice thinly, brush with Olive oil, and sprinkle with garlic salt. Either toast on both sides in a 400 degree oven until lightly browned on both sides or broil until lightly browned, turning once. Cool. Store in an airtight container or up to a week.

You can use a variety of cheeses to top the crostini: You can use a Boursin or any soft cheese spread; you can use feta cheese or goat cheese. You can even use cream cheese if you like --- you can actually fold the pesto or roasted red peppers into the cream cheese instead of topping with them if you desire.

You can then top the cheese spread onto the crostini with a variety of toppings: Try Basil pesto with slices of grape tomatoes, or chopped roasted red peppers or marinated artichoke hearts or an olive tapenade. You can top with tabbouleh or chopped herbs or add a cooked shrimp on top. You can top with chopped bacon and chopped hard boil egg and chopped chives. You can even mix some dried or fresh dill with softened cream cheese to top a thin slice of smoked salmon added to the top of the crostini - yum! Just use your imagination and the crostinis can be beautiful and delicious.

If you would like a lighter version of these imaginative appetizers, use cucumber slices in lieu of the crostinis. Using a peeler or zester, peel ridges down the cucumber and then slice into 1/4 inch slices. Blot with paper towel. Top with herbed cheese spread or Boursin and then top with chopped chives, minced roasted red peppers, tomatoes, bacon bits or minced hard boil egg.

The Tempting Tuscan Dip

1 15 oz. Can Cannellini (white beans), drained
2 Cloves Garlic, minced
1/2 Cup Onion, chopped finely
1/2 Cup Roasted red pepper, chopped finely
1/4 Cup Italian parsley, chopped finely
Pinch Crushed Red Pepper (optional)
1 Tab. Your favorite Italian Salad Dressing
1 Cup Mozzarella Cheese, shredded
2 Tab. Grated Parmesan Cheese

Place beans and garlic in a blender container and blend until smooth. Spread on bottom of an oven-proof 9 inch plate or pie plate. Combine the onion, roasted red pepper, Italian parsley and Italian salad dressing and spoon over the bean layer. Top with the Mozzarella Cheese and the Parmesan cheese. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Bake for 15-20 minutes or until heated through. Serve with crostini, breadsticks or crackers.

Friendly Family Cheese Log/Ball

Using cheeses that are pasteurized and processed, cheese balls became a tradition in 1920. This simple and easy recipe uses pantry items on hand for one of the best cheese balls ever!

1 5 oz. Jar of Roka Blue Cheese Spread
2 5 oz. Jars of Sharp American or Cheddar Cheese Spread

1 8 oz. Package of Cream Cheese, softened
1/2 Tsp. Worcestershire sauce
Splash Hot pepper sauce
1/2 Cup Pecans, chopped or chopped Parsley

Combine the first four ingredients and chill. Shaped into a ball or round or log and coat with either the pecans or parsley or both. Serve with crackers. Or you could make this cheese ball recipe given to me ages and ages ago and still great after all these years!

Party Cheese Ball

3 8 oz. Packages of Cream Cheese, Softened
1 Tab. Worcestershire Sauce
1/2 Teas. Minced Garlic or you can use equivalent of garlic powder
1 Tab. Hot Pepper sauce
1 lb. (16 oz.) Sharp Cheddar Cheese, shredded
1 Cup Pecans, toasted and chopped
1/4 Cup Fresh parsley, chopped

In a food processor or blender, combine the cream cheese, garlic, Worcestershire sauce and hot pepper sauce. Blend well. Add cheddar cheese and process just until the cheddar is fine, but still visible. Shape the mixture into a ball or logs or both. Wrap individually in plastic wrap and place in the freezer. While the balls are in the freezer, combine the ground pecans and parsley in a bowl or pie plate. Remove the balls or logs from the freezer and roll them in the pecan and parsley mixture. This recipe also freezes up to 3 months so it can be made ahead and ready when you are!

Cheese Salami Cones

1/4 lb. Sliced Geneo Salami (or you can use Hard Salami)
2 8 oz. Packages of Cream Cheese, softened
1 Tab. Grated Parmesan Cheese

Combine the softened cream cheese with the Parmesan and scoop into an icing bag or press with a large star tip. Using a kitchen shears, cut a slit halfway through the salami slices. Twist tips of cut salami slices to form cones. Pipe the cream cheese filling into the cones in a spiral fashion and refrigerate until serving time. (They will look like little ice cream cones.)

BLT Dip

1 lb. Bacon --- I love Jungle Jim's brand
1 Cup Mayonnaise
1 Cup Sour Cream
1 Tomato, peeled, seeded and diced
Or chop some of the Grape tomatoes to make 1 cup

Using a large, sharp knife, slice entire pound of bacon into 1/2 inch slices and separate into pieces in a large skillet. Cook over medium heat until bacon pieces are browned and crisp. Using a large slotted spoon, transfer bacon pieces to paper towels and allow to drain and cool. In a medium bowl, combine the mayonnaise and the sour cream. Stir in the crisp, cooked bacon pieces. Cover and refrigerate until serving time. Add the diced tomatoes right before serving. Serve with crackers or ridge chips and watch it disappear!

Buffalo Chicken Dip

2-3 Skinless, boneless Chicken Breasts, cooked
1 16 oz. (1 lb.) Sharp Cheddar Cheese, shredded
1 8 oz. Package Cream Cheese, softened
1 Cup Frank's Red Hot Original Cayenne Pepper Sauce*

You can cook the chicken in a low saucepan with water to cover and a little salt and pepper. Bring to a boil and then reduce to a simmer and cook until juices run clear, about 20-25 minutes. Or you can bake the chicken or use the meat from a cooked rotisserie chicken bought at the Jungle. After cooking and cooling, shred chicken into bite size pieces. (I also like to shred my cheese from a block of cheese as it seems to melt smoother than packaged shredded cheddar - but my boys use the packaged because it's easier and it works, too.) NOTE: It is very important that you ONLY use FRANK'S Red Hot Original Cayenne Pepper Sauce or you will not get that wonderful Buffalo Chicken Wing flavor!

Combine the softened cream cheese, shredded cheddar cheese and the hot sauce in a large bowl. Stir in shredded cooked chicken. Spread in an oven-proof pan, deep pie or quiche dish or any oven-proof ceramic dish or plate and cover with aluminum foil. Bake covered in a preheated oven at 350 degrees for 30-40 minutes or until heated through. Serve warm with tortilla chips, corn chips, or crackers. Fantastic!!

Pepperoni Pizza Dip

1 8 oz.. Cream Cheese, softened
1 8 oz. Jar of Ragu Pizza Quick Sauce
1 Pkg. Of sliced Pepperoni
2 Tabs. Grated Parmesan Cheese

Can garnish with sliced black olives, shredded mozzarella, or chopped parsley if you wish. Spread the softened cream cheese in a microwave safe or oven-proof dish or pie dish. Top with the jar of Pizza Quick Sauce. Cut the Pepperoni Slices into quarters using your kitchen shears and top the entire surface of the sauce with the pepperoni. Sprinkle on the parmesan cheese and heat in microwave or oven until heated through. Garnish if desired. Serve with crackers.

Well, I could go on and on, but this should certainly get you started on celebrating the season with little time and little effort but with great big delicious results. **Wishing you and yours a very very safe and warm and merry holiday season!**