

An Elegant Christmas Dinner

Christmas dinner (either Eve or Night) is often the most luxurious home-cooked meal of the year; one mom told me recently that it's only one of two occasions during the year when she uses her oven.

After weeks of mall-hopping, present-wrapping, party-going and house-decorating, there is little energy or interest left to prepare an elegant dinner. Thoughts of Christmas tree-shaped pizzas dance in your head. But you will never live that down, so better get your holiday groove on one last time.

Here's an elegant Christmas dinner menu that's only moderately challenging to prepare. Serve the salad cups first then the rib roast, scalloped potatoes and asparagus as the entrée. You can make a horseradish cream sauce to serve with the roast and some popovers if you're feeling ambitious!

Christmas Salad Cups

2-3 small head of lettuce such as radicchio or butter lettuce
Spring salad mix with red and green (baby spinach and baby red romaine or red chard)
Pomegranate seeds
Goat cheese or gorgonzola cheese crumbles
Sugared pecans pieces
Balsamic vinegar
Olive or grapeseed oil

Carefully separate radicchio or butter lettuce leaves from head. Gently wash each lettuce "cup" and allow to dry. Rinse salad mix and allow to dry thoroughly.

In a small bowl, pour in 2T balsamic vinegar. Slowly whisk in 6T (or slightly more than 1/3 cup) of oil into the vinegar. Sprinkle in salt and pepper to taste. Allow vinaigrette to sit (no need to chill).

Place a small amount of salad mix into each lettuce cup. Sprinkle pomegranate seeds, sugared pecans and cheese crumbles on top. Dress each salad with small amount of vinaigrette.

Standing Prime Rib Roast

7-8 pound roast (about one pound per person)
3 tablespoons kosher salt
2 tablespoons fresh ground pepper
Fresh rosemary (about 5-6 stems)
2 tablespoons butter
Roasting pan, aluminum foil, baster

Remove roast from refrigerator about two hours prior to cooking time.

Preheat oven to 450°. Remove rosemary from thick stems and chop to yield about 3 tablespoons. Liberally season entire roast with kosher salt and fresh ground pepper. Rub butter on both raw ends of the roast.



Set roast with rib-side down and fat-side up on a large rack in a roasting pan. Place in oven and roast at high heat for 30 minutes.

After 30 minutes, baste roast with fat drippings in the pan. Reduce oven temperature to 350° and roast for another 1 ½ - 2 hours or 12-15 minutes per pound. Baste every 20-25 minutes (do this quickly so oven temperature doesn't drop too much.) While roast is cooking, prepare the scalloped potatoes for baking.

Remove roast when meat thermometer inserted into the deepest part of the roast registers 120° for rare, 130° for medium rare and 140° for medium (temperature will rise another 5-8 degrees while resting.)

Baste one more time then cover roast with foil and allow to rest while you prepare potatoes and asparagus. Set oven temperature to 375° to bake scalloped potatoes.



Gruyere Scalloped Potatoes

7-8 large baking potatoes
2 ½ cups heavy cream
One pound gruyere cheese
½ teaspoon ground nutmeg
3 tablespoons each flour and butter
2 tablespoons kosher salt
One teaspoon white pepper

While roast is cooking, make cream sauce: In a small saucepan, melt butter over medium-low heat. Whisk in flour and toast slightly until mixture is smooth, about 2-3 minutes. Slowly whisk in heavy cream. Simmer over low heat – whisking occasionally – and sprinkle in one tablespoon of the kosher salt, nutmeg and white pepper. Continue to simmer until mixture thickens, about 5-6 minutes. Remove from heat. (You can make this a day ahead, refrigerate and warm up over a very low heat setting.)

Shred gruyere cheese.

Assemble scalloped potatoes: Spray non-stick spray in an 8 x 10 or 9 x 11 baking dish. Peel and thinly slice potatoes. Pour a few tablespoons of sauce into the bottom of the dish and spread until thin. Layer potato slices, slightly overlapping until dish is covered. Sprinkle with salt then pour 1/3rd of the remaining sauce over the potatoes. Shred one cup of gruyere cheese and sprinkle over the sauce.

Repeat this combination twice more until shredded cheese is the last layer.

Bake potatoes: Place dish in the oven and bake until cheese is browned and bubbly and potatoes are fork-tender, about 30-35 minutes. Cover with foil and prepare the asparagus.



Oven-roasted asparagus

2 pounds thin asparagus (about ¼ pound per person)

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 tablespoon each kosher salt and ground pepper

Heat oven to 425°

Trim tough ends from each stalk. Place asparagus in a large jelly roll pan (a cookie sheet with sides) and drizzle with olive oil. Sprinkle with salt and pepper.

Roast until asparagus is browned but still slightly firm, about 5-6 minutes. Serve with freshly shredded parmesan cheese or a Hollandaise sauce (good recipes found online.)