

## OPEN YOUR HOUSE FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Story &amp; photos by Tracy Beard

*Welcome ~ come on in, it's great to see you!*

The holidays are a fantastic time to gather with friends and family. After the last year and a half, it's time to pull out the stops and spend time celebrating life with those you love! Display your favorite decorations, prepare tasty bites to eat and whip up some creative beverages to enjoy the season. To assist you in kicking off the festivities, below you will find one of my favorite warming winter cocktails and various delicious appetizer recipes discovered during my travels in 2021.

I love Ina Garten. She gives valuable party tips in several of her books and videos. She breaks down party planning and shares how to entertain without working too hard.

- Pick a color theme - purchase flowers within one color palette and follow that theme with decorations and perhaps paper plates or napkins.
- Prepare three or four dishes.
- Assemble a few other platters.
- Serve beer and wine if you wish; but if cocktails are your thing, pick one or two for people to choose from and set them out in pitchers for self-service.
- Put together party favors or some entertainment.

**Let's Get This Party Started**

Entertainment comes in many forms. Whether you hire musicians, book a comedian, play games or come up with something even more inspiring, guests always enjoy a performance. While attending a multi-course dinner during a vintner weekend at the Triple Creek Ranch in Darby, Montana, Fred Zammtaro, the CPA and principal at Schramsberg Vineyards, asked me to saber a bottle of bubbly. Before dinner Fred gave me some instructions, and after the first course I was "on stage."

I was a bit nervous standing in front of the packed dining room, but I followed Fred's advice and one, two, three, I sliced through the glass bottleneck and, voilà, the bubbles sprayed out. I think I was just as excited as the other guests, and I was thrilled that it worked on my first try. I don't advise doing this at home unless you know what you are doing. Open a door and point the bottle outward to avoid drenching your floor and furniture with sparkling wine or champagne.

**The Food**

Make this holiday season memorable. Use some of these incredible recipes or pull out some of your favorites. Take Ina's advice and assemble a few dishes. For simplicity, you could reheat some pre-cooked chicken wings and serve them with a variety of sauces, or prepare a hummus plate with roasted butternut squash, olives, tomatoes, cucumbers, and a side of tzatziki and some warm pita bread. And following are some other ideas for great food.

**RECIPES**

I first had a version of this hot cocktail at Farrar's Bistro in Vancouver, Washington. I adapted the recipe as some ingredients were impossible to get, and was quite happy with the results.

**Tracy's Toffee Toddy**

- ¾ cup water
- 1 tablespoon Reser's hot buttered rum mix or something comparable
- 1 ounce spiced rum
- ¼ ounce crème de banana
- ½ ounce butterscotch schnapps

Heat water in the microwave until boiling. Add Reser's and stir. Add liquors and stir. Pour into a pretty glass and top with whipped cream.

While staying at The Sebastian in Vail, Colorado, Executive Chef Kristen York at the Leonora restaurant coordinated with her staff to create a special dinner for my son Garrett, my daughter-in-law Victoria and me. Everything was scrumptious, but we all agreed that the Filipino Pork Belly Pintxo created by Chef de Cuisine John Adams was our favorite.

**Filipino Pork Belly Pintxo**

- 1 pound pork belly
- ¼ cup scallion greens, sliced
- Sesame seeds for garnish
- Skewers

**Marinade**

- 1 clove garlic, peeled
- 1 teaspoon ginger, peeled
- 1 stalk lemongrass, tough exterior and ends removed
- ½ cup soy or tamari sauce
- ¼ cup tamarind pulp
- ⅛ cup lime juice
- ⅛ cup rice vinegar
- 2 tablespoons fish sauce
- ½ cup brown or coconut palm sugar
- 2 tablespoons honey
- ½ cup banana ketchup

Place all the ingredients for the marinade in a blender and blend until very smooth. Cut the pork belly into 1-½ inch strips and use half of the marinade to marinate the pork overnight in a ziplock bag. Roast the pork belly on a foil-covered pan at 300° F. for 2-3 hours or until tender. Let rest at room temperature for one hour and then refrigerate. Cut the pork belly strips into ¼-inch slices. Skewer 2-3 pieces per skewer, depending on the size of the skewer you have. Grill over high heat for one minute on each side, brush with a thin layer of marinade and grill for another 30 seconds on each side or until it becomes caramelized. Garnish with toasted sesame seeds and scallions.

My daughter Brittney and I spent a few days at The Esperanza in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. This opulent resort features two tasty restaurants and yummy poolside dining. Las Estrellas specializes in Italian food and wood-fired pizzas and sits nestled in a park-like setting surrounded by a lovely garden. Executive Chef Alexis Palacios oversees all food at the resort.

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archival purposes*



**GREAT PARTY FOOD**

Clockwise from left: Filipino Park Belly Pintxo; Hummus with roasted butternut squash, olives, tomatoes, cucumbers and tzatziki sauce and pita bread; Chicken wings with sauces; Fried Vietnamese Rolls with fresh mint and Nuoc Cham sauce, Roasted Butternut Fondue.



**Roasted Butternut Fondue**

- 1/2 cup shredded Gouda cheese
- 1/2 cup shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1/2 cup white wine
- 2 leaves fresh sage
- 1 shallot, sliced
- 3 pounds butternut squash
- 1/3 cup whipping cream
- Olive oil
- Assorted breads

Sauté the shallots in olive oil for 5 minutes, then slowly add the white wine and simmer for five additional minutes until reduced. Slice the butternut squash into medium-sized pieces and roast them in the oven at 350° for 30 minutes or until tender. Remove from the oven and carefully remove the skin and seeds. Using a spoon, incorporate the butternut squash with the shallots and mix gently for eight minutes over low heat. Let it cool down and place it in the blender with the whipping cream, sage, Gouda and mozzarella cheeses until smooth. Place in an oven-safe container and bake in the oven at 350° for approximately 15 minutes or until melted.

During an incredible three-week road trip through Costa Rica, my friend, Connie, and I sampled numerous tantalizing bites. One evening after a wild boat trip through the mangroves, we stopped at Citrus in Ojochal, a quaint little restaurant just a 30-minute drive from our accommodations in Uvita, Costa Rica. Chef Marcella Marciano is not only a charming and hospitable woman, but also a talented chef. Everything we had at Citrus was delicious. The Nems, fried Vietnamese rolls stuffed with shrimp, pork, and shitake mushrooms, were served with fresh mint and nuoc cham sauce. This dish was so good that we returned the following night and ordered them again.

**The Nems – Fried Vietnamese Rolls**

- 2 ounces dried thin rice noodles
- 1/4 cup shrimp, washed, peeled, and cut into small pieces
- 3/4 cup ground pork
- 2 large eggs, beaten
- 1 carrot, grated
- 4 shiitake mushrooms, chopped
- 2 green onions, chopped
- 1/2 teaspoon white sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 24 rice paper wrappers
- 2 cups vegetable oil
- 24 fresh mint leaves, washed

Soak rice noodles in cold water for about 20 minutes until soft; drain well. Cut into 2-inch pieces. Combine noodles, pork, shrimp, eggs, carrot, shiitake mushrooms and green onions in a large bowl. Sprinkle in sugar, salt, and black pepper. Stir filling and mixture well. Soak one rice paper wrapper in a shallow bowl of warm water to soften, about 15 seconds. Remove from water and place on a damp cloth laid out on a flat surface. Place one tablespoon of filling mixture into the center of the softened rice paper. Fold the bottom edge into the center, covering the filling. Fold in opposing edges and roll up tightly. Repeat with remaining rice paper wrappers, soaking and filling each one individually. Heat the oil in a wok or large skillet over medium heat. Fry the spring rolls in batches of three or four for about five minutes, until crisp and golden brown on both sides. Drain on paper towels.

Serve with fresh mint and nuoc cham sauce.

**Nuoc Cham sauce**

- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1/4 cup fresh lime juice
- 3 tablespoons fish sauce
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1-2 bird's eye chilies with seeds, minced

In a small bowl, whisk the sugar into 1/4 cup water until dissolved. Stir in the lime juice, fish sauce, garlic and chilies to combine. The sauce keeps in the refrigerator for up to three days.

You can substitute with store-bought sweet chili sauce.

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Vancouver, Wash. resident Tracy Beard, pictured here with her husband, Steve, writes about luxury and adventure travel, traditional and trendy fine dining and libations for regional, national and international magazines. She has written CRR's "Out & About" column since 2016.