

Hogtown HomeGrown

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Simple Summer Suppers

Summertime can be so busy and hot that cooking is the last thing on my mind, but everyone still gets hungry and supper has to appear on the table at some point. When the boys were younger and we spent every afternoon in the Westside or YMCA pool, I cooked early in the day so it was ready when we got home. To avoid heating up the kitchen and house, sometimes we ate cold dinners, like pasta salads, or I used the microwave to reheat the meal I cooked that morning. With such an abundance of produce during the summer, salads become a staple meal by adding beans, cheese or other protein sources to whatever veggies I have on hand. There were times when our boys just didn't like many veggies or agree on which veggies they would eat, so we would have a salad bar. This works well for parties too—just prep all the veggies and add-ins and place in individual containers. Since everyone picks their favorites, there are no arguments! Another popular simple supper, especially when served as an indoor picnic, is our Dip Dinner (page 4). Whatever you serve for your summer suppers, make sure there are old favorites and new options so that everyone develops a taste for a variety of fresh veggies and healthy food!

Creamy Pasta Salad

INGREDIENTS

1 pound whole wheat pasta
2 pounds veggies, cut into bite-sized pieces
1 pound fresh shrimp (optional)
1 cup mayonnaise
1 cup sour cream
2 lemons, juiced and zested
2 limes, juiced and zested
1 bunch green onions, chopped
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

DIRECTIONS

Cook pasta according to package directions, pour into colander to drain and rinse with cold water. Let drain and cool for at least 10 minutes.
If using shrimp, cook according to Perfect Fall Saturday Shrimp recipe (look it up at

www.hogtownhomegrown.com) and allow to chill in refrigerator. Peel before adding to salad.

Combine pasta and veggies in large bowl. Mix remaining ingredients together to make dressing. Stir in half the dressing to coat the pasta and veggies. Add shrimp now and 1/2 the remaining dressing. Stir well. Eat immediately or refrigerate until serving. Serve extra dressing on the side.

Lower Fat Options

Replace mayonnaise and sour cream with light mayonnaise and light sour cream (I do not recommend fat-free versions of either) OR use nonfat yogurt (to replace mayonnaise) and light sour cream, plus 1/2 teaspoon salt.

Fried Okra—

Patties or Loose?

When my husband and I got married, we agreed on almost all the important issues, except okra! Granny always made fried okra patties—a corn-bread-okra fritter. He had always eaten loose fried okra—individual pieces coated with cornmeal and spices, fried until crunchy and eaten like popcorn. By the way, we still don't agree, but now we eat our okra steamed or roasted.

This time of year, it gets so hot, that very few crops thrive, but if you combine them, some of the hot weather crops taste great together. Try the following combinations—okra, corn, onions, peppers and tomatoes (gumbo), corn and lima beans (succotash), zucchini, tomatoes, eggplant and peppers (ratatouille), tomatillos, onions, hot peppers and tomatoes (salsa).

It's Local, It's Fresh, It's Okra

Originally found in Africa, this pod-like vegetable spread to the eastern Mediterranean (used in many stew-like dishes) and India (used in curries) before landing in North America. While it is not the most popular vegetable on the block, thousands of pounds of okra are grown in the South each year for sale to soup manufacturers, and most of the rest is consumed fried as fast food or cooked into gumbos and stews. Okra has developed a reputation for being slimy and most people avoid it, but steaming or roasting okra may convert even the pickiest eater.

Steamed Okra

When choosing okra, look for young pods, about 3 to 4 inches long. Wash pods and leave whole, do not cut or trim. Using a pot with a steamer basket, bring the water to a boil before placing the okra in the basket. Cover and steam for about 3-5 minutes, until a knife can be easily inserted into pod. The pods should maintain their shape and color. Remove from steamer immediately, so they do not overcook. Pick up by the stem end and bite into the pod to eat. Try steamed okra with a little salt or even some butter to dip the pod into. For real decadence, serve it with Hollandaise or Aioli. Still too much slime? Try roasted okra instead!

What's Fresh Right Now?

Apples—Anna, Golden Dorset
Beans—green, Roma, lima, butter
Blueberries—rabbit-eyes
Corn—white, silver queen, bi-color
Cucumbers—hydroponic
Eggplant—Italian, Oriental, white
Greens—turnip, collard
Kohlrabi
Melons—watermelon, cantaloupe
Okra
Onions—green, dry
Peaches
Peas—white acre, black-eye, zipper cream
Peppers—cherry, cubanelle, Anaheim, poblanos, green, red
Potatoes—new, red, sweet
Squash—yellow, zucchini, patty pan, spaghetti, Delicata, acorn, butternut, Pink Banana
Tomatillos—regular, pineapple
Tomatoes—red, sun-gold, cherry, grape, baby plum, golden cherry

Roasted Gumbo

INGREDIENTS

2 cups okra, sliced lengthwise and chopped
4 ears corn, shucked
4 ribs celery, chopped
1 large onion, chopped
2 cups small plum tomatoes, halved
2 sweet peppers, chopped
Olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS

Since the veggies cook at different rates, toss each with olive oil and place in separate piles on cookie sheets in a 375 oven, so you can remove the individual veggies as they finish cooking. Okra and onions will be done in 30 minutes, with tomatoes usually taking an hour. When everything is cooked, sweet and tender, mix all veggies with corn cut from cob. Add salt and pepper if desired and maybe some hot sauce for a little kick! Serve hot with brown basmati rice for a meal. Can also be served as a side dish. Since the okra cooks up crisp and tender, there's no "slime"!

Spicy Acorn Squash Soup

INGREDIENTS

2 acorn squash—try the white variety “Cream of the Crop”, steamed or roasted until tender
2 tablespoons olive oil
1/2 onion, diced
2 cloves garlic, sliced
1/8 teaspoon each—cumin, curry powder, chipotle pepper, ground ginger, salt, black pepper
1 Tablespoon sugar (raw or brown)
1-2 cups no-chicken chicken broth or vegetable broth

DIRECTIONS

Heat olive oil and slowly cook onion and garlic until translucent and fragrant. Add spices and fry 1-2 minutes to release flavors. Scoop the squash from the skins and mash squash into the warm spice pan with the back of a spoon or potato masher. Stir squash into onion-spice mixture and heat until bubbly. Add sugar and stir in broth to desired consistency. Serve at any temperature.

Grilled Marlin for Four

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 pounds marlin (4 small pieces)
1 Tablespoon olive oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

DIRECTIONS

First season and then oil fish on both sides. Grill on foil over high heat until firm to touch in center, about 5 minutes per side for 1 inch steaks. Let sit 2-3 minutes before serving.

Bowtie Pasta Salad

INGREDIENTS

12 ounces whole wheat bowtie pasta
8 ounce log of goat cheese, broken into marble-sized chunks
1— 8 ounce jar of oil-packed, julienne cut, sun-dried tomatoes, with oil
6 green onions, sliced
2 Tablespoons red wine vinegar
Ground black pepper to taste
Optional Topping—1/2 cup toasted pine nuts
OR 1 Tablespoon capers, packed in white balsamic vinegar

DIRECTIONS

Cook pasta according to package instructions and drain but do not rinse. Pour into large bowl, add all ingredients, toss and serve.

Tricks and Tips

Since I had already roasted the squash and stored it in the refrigerator, this dinner only took about 30 minutes to create. If you start the onions for the soup, preheat the grill and put the pasta water on to boil all at the same time, you can whip out this menu in no time. Put the fish on the grill after the soup is done and the pasta salad is tossed. The little extra time the pasta salad sits makes the goat cheese creamy and delicious.

Hogtown HomeGrown

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Dip Dinner

INGREDIENTS

Sweet peppers
Cucumbers
Small tomatoes, cherry or grape
Broccoli and/or cauliflower florets
Sugar Snap Peas
Small mushrooms
Red globe radishes
Carrots
Celery
Sliced apples and pears
Whole wheat crunchy breadsticks
French bread or Rosemary Baguette
Whole wheat pita bread
Chevre, ricotta or another soft cheese
Hummus or another bean dip
Ranch dressing
Plain yogurt mixed with dressing or herbs
Peanut, almond or another nut butter

DIRECTIONS

Clean and trim all veggies into two-bite pieces. Mix ice and water in a large bowl and add veggies so they can chill and crisp. When ready to serve, drain and pat dry. Place all veggies and fruit on a large platter. Cut bread and pitas; place with breadsticks in a basket or bowl (think party platter!). Serve dips in individual bowls. Give everyone a plate (sectioned plates work really well for this) and a butter knife and let them enjoy themselves. Younger children need a little help to make sure they pick a balance of foods, but with such a wide selection it is hard to go wrong. Leftover veggies can be combined with dressing to create a side dish salad for another meal. At our house, there are seldom any leftover dips or bread!

Tricks and Tips

Party and finger foods are always a hit with kids, but a Dip Dinner can be an occasion! Try an indoor picnic—spread a tablecloth on the floor and put the platters in the middle. Sometimes we place everything on the coffee table and watch a family movie while munching away.