

Extension

Seasonal Eating Whitney Danhof, Extension Agent

Festive Holiday Appetizers December 2014

Appetizers are the food of the holidays. From office parties to football games to tree decorating night, finger foods are perfect for parties. I love a plate filled with little bites of all different flavors. Fresh, canned and dried produce can pack appetizers with flavor and add color to the table as well. Vegetable and fruit trays are the standard, but there are many other ways to use produce in appetizers.

Stuffed mushrooms are always a hit at parties. You can fill them with cheese, greens like collards or spinach or sausage stuffing. Dipping them in a garlic and olive oil mixture before baking helps keep them from cracking and drying out. Baking on the lowest rack of the oven browns the mushrooms on the bottom.



Fruit kabobs are a different way to serve fruit. Try making them fun by creating little Grinchy Bobs. Place a green grape on a toothpick and then to create a Santa hat, a slice of banana, a strawberry with the cap cut off and a miniature marshmallow.

Cranberry sauce poured over cream cheese makes a beautiful red spread for crackers. You can make your own sauce from fresh cranberries or use canned whole berry cranberry sauce.

Bruschetta, toasted slices of French or Italian bread with toppings, is another place to add produce. Try roasting canned diced tomatoes with a little olive oil and chopped fresh rosemary to spoon over the toasts with some grated Parmesan cheese. Onions, cooked down until caramelized with thyme and a sprinkle of Gruyere cheese is another option.

Dips can be filled with artichokes and spinach, sun-dried tomatoes and pesto or roasted peppers. Speaking of peppers, Jalapeno poppers are also a popular appetizer but can be a process to make for a large group. You can get the same flavors of jalapeno, cheese, ranch and bacon in a dip, which is much easier to make. In the recipe below, the jalapenos and a bell pepper are charred and peeled to create the roasted flavor of the popper. Cream cheese, mayonnaise, Cheddar cheese and ranch dressing serve as the base, with the peppers and green onions folded in and a melty cheese layer and bacon on top. Serve warm with corn chips and you'll have all the popper flavor with a lot less work.

Take the opportunity to sneak a little produce in your party appetizers this holiday season and be sure to check out the UT Extension Seasonal Eating webpage at <https://extension.tennessee.edu/Bedford/Pages/Seasonal-Eating.aspx> for more recipes using seasonal produce for the holidays.

Jalapeno Popper Dip

2 large jalapeño peppers
1/2 red bell pepper
8 ounces cream cheese, softened
1/2 cup mayonnaise
1 tablespoon ranch salad dressing
1 1/2 cups shredded Cheddar cheese, divided
1/4 cup sliced green onions
4 slices bacon, cooked and finely chopped

Place the peppers on a baking sheet and poke with a knife. Place under the broiler and broil until the skin is blistered and blackened, turning to blacken all sides. Remove to a bowl and cover with plastic wrap. Let steam in the bowl for a few minutes. With a paring knife, scrape off most of the skin then cut open and scrape out seeds and stem. Chop the flesh of the peppers. In a mixer bowl, beat together the cream cheese, mayonnaise, salad dressing, 1 cup of the cheese, green onion and chopped roasted peppers. Pour into a greased pie plate. Top with remaining 1/2 cup of cheese. Bake at 350 degrees for 20 minutes, until hot and bubbly. Sprinkle with bacon and return to oven for 5 more minutes. Serve hot with corn chips.