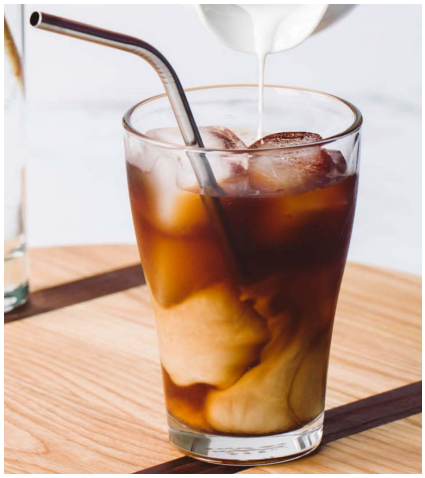
HAPPY MOM LIFE LAB

12 Best Summer Recipes: Salads, Cocktails, Dinners, Dessert and More

#1 - Simple Delicious Cold Brew



Prep time: 5-7 minutes
Serves: 8 people
Pairs well with: anything :)

A. For Cold Brew Coffee:

1. Using your favorite whole bean coffee, measure out 1 cup of beans.
2. Place them into your coffee grinder, and with quick short pulses, grind your beans until they are coarsely ground. You do not want a fine grind for this; you'll want to see some chunks of coffee bean in there mixed in with the grounds. The brew ratio you are looking for is: 1 cup of ground coffee per 4 cups of filtered water.
3. Grab your quart-sized Ball jar and pop in the filter.
4. Carefully spoon your beans into the filter, and then slowly pour your cold filtered water over the beans until your jar is full.
5. Cap the jar, place in your refrigerator for at least 12 hours, or preferably overnight.
6. Once ready, carefully lift the filter out, discard your grounds, and, boom!

Your brew is ready to enjoy!

12 Best Summer Recipes: Salads, Cocktails, Dinners, Dessert and More

B. For Cold Brew Iced Tea:

Using your favorite loose leaf black tea, brew using the instructions above, but make sure to use this ratio instead for your cold brew iced tea: 4 heaping teaspoon of loose leaf black tea per 4 cups of filtered water. Here is a link to my favorite loose leaf tea to use if you need a recommendation! https://www.mayatea.com/products/south-indian-fop-black

Like your cold brew a little sweet? Here are two easy syrups that are delicious in both iced coffee and iced tea. Keep them handy in your fridge to sweeten your day...

Minty Sweet Syrup

- ½ cup fresh mint leaves
- 1/3 cup filtered water
- 1/3 cup granulated sugar

To create this syrup:

1. In a small saucepan, bring the sugar and the water to a boil.
2. Boil for 1-2 minutes or until the sugar is all the way dissolved.
3. Remove from heat.
4. Give your mint leaves a little squeeze in your hand to bruise the leaves, then add it to the sugar/water mixture and let it all steep together for 45 minutes to an hour.
5. Strain out the mint leaves and store up to 2 weeks in your refrigerator.

HAPPY MOM LIFE LAB

12 Best Summer Recipes: Salads, Cocktails, Dinners, Dessert and More

Toasted Coconut and Blackberry Syrup

- 1/3 cup of filtered water
- 1/3 cup granulated sugar
- 1/3 cup toasted shredded coconut (recipe follows)
- 1/3 cup frozen or fresh blackberries

To toast your coconut:

1. Preheat your oven broiler and set coconut shreds onto a sheet pan.
2. Set under the broiler, and toast until your coconut has a hint of golden brown. This happens very fast, so watch carefully and don't leave your oven!
3. Remove from oven and let cool while you make your syrup.
4. In a small saucepan, bring the sugar and the water to a boil.
5. Boil for 1-2 minutes or until the sugar is all the way dissolved.
6. Add the blackberries and toasted coconut and give a stir.
7. Remove from heat and let it all steep together for 45 minutes to an hour.
8. Strain out the solids and store up to 2 weeks in your refrigerator.

Notes:

- No time to make syrups? No problem! Sweeten with honey, agave, or your favorite Monin or Torani store bought syrups.
- These brew methods can be doubled easily.
- Using a French press to brew and strain is a good alternative to using the filter or cheesecloth.
- Make ice cubes out of cold brew instead of water to eliminate dilution.
- If you'd rather use an auto brew machine, check out this beauty https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B078RQVQF1/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_search_asin_title?ie=UTF8&psc=1. NQM's founder Elizabeth has it and raves about it.
- Here is my favorite coffee vessel /accessories to enjoy my brew:
    - Ball 16 oz. Wide-Mouth Clear Glass Mason Jar
    - Jillmo Stainless Steel Wide-Mouth Mason Jar Rings Bands
    - Ball Sip and Straw Lids (Fits Wide-Mouth Jars)
    - SipWell Stainless Steel Drinking Straws (Free Cleaning Brush Included)
    - Ball Wide-Mouth Plastic Storage Caps
    - Breville BDC450 Precision Brewer Coffee Maker with Thermal Carafe

HAPPY MOM LIFE LAB

12 Best Summer Recipes: Salads, Cocktails, Dinners, Dessert and More

#2 - Raspberry Rose Shrub & Blackberry Basil Shrub

Serves: approx 2 people

A. Raspberry Rose Shrub

Ingredients:

- 2 cups fresh raspberries
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 1-2 cups apple cider vinegar
- 1/3 cup dried red rose buds and/or petals

B. Blackberry Basil Shrub

Ingredients:

- 2 cups fresh blackberries
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 1-2 cups apple cider vinegar
- 1/3 cup packed chopped fresh basil leaves

Method:

1. Pick which shrub you would like to make, and in a small bowl, mix everything together except the vinegar. You will add that later.
2. Cover your bowl and set it into the fridge to fully macerate. This will take approx 2-4 days. To help the process, give it a good stir each day to keep the liquid moving a bit.
3. Once you see that your berries have become liquid, using a fine mesh sieve, drain your berry mixture into a glass ball jar or other container and discard the solids.
4. Now, add in your Apple Cider Vinegar. This is a matter of preference here, most recipes call for a 1:1 ratio of vinegar to berry syrup, so if you like a stronger shrub do this, but I found that adding about 1 ½ cups of vinegar was about perfect.
5. Boom, your shrub is done! It will taste strong and tart at first, but gets mellower and develops deeper flavor the longer it sits in the refrigerator.

12 Best Summer Recipes: Salads, Cocktails, Dinners, Dessert and More

I Made It! Now What?

Now you can get creative! For a tasty mocktail, add 2-3 tbsp of syrup over ice and top with seltzer, club soda, or Tonic water, adjusting the syrup as necessary to your desired sweetness. For summer cocktails, do the same, but add in a 1.5 oz of Vodka, or Gin, or Bourbon, they go so well with both these syrups! Cheers!

Notes:

- If you can't find dried rosebud/petal, you can find them here: https://www.amazon.com/Alive-Herbal-Organic-Dried-Petals/dp/B078PGPQMD/ref=sr_1_6?crid=3FH8UNCVS9JLP&keywords=dried+rose+buds&qid=1565045522&s=gateway&sprefix=dried+rose%2Csporting%2C230&sr=8-6
- Shrubs are super versatile, so feel free to follow this method, and swap out the berries and spices.
- Some other contenders in my kitchen were a Peach and Lemon zest shrub, and Strawberry Coriander, so many great possibilities!
- These also make a great hostess gift dressed up in a cute ball jar with a bottle your favorite mixer on the side.

HAPPY MOM LIFE LAB

12 Best Summer Recipes: Salads, Cocktails, Dinners, Dessert and More

#3 - Sun-Dried Tomato and Olive Pesto & Spinach Basil Pesto

A. Sun-Dried Tomato and Olive Pesto

Ingredients:

- 8.5 oz jar sun dried tomatoes packed in olive oil, drained
- ½ cup fresh finely grated parmesan cheese
- ¼ cup packed fresh basil leaves
- 1 large garlic clove
- ¼ tsp. kosher salt
- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
- Pinch of cayenne
- ¼ cup packed kalamata olives

Method:

1. Place all of your ingredients except for the kalamata olives into the bowl of a food processor fitted with a steel blade.
2. Process for about one minute or until all ingredients are smooth and fully incorporated.
3. Now, add your kalamata olives and give 2-3 very short pulses to coarsely break up the kalamata olives. You'll want chunks of it in your pesto, not processed into your pesto.
4. Adjust for salt and pepper if needed.

12 Best Summer Recipes: Salads, Cocktails, Dinners, Dessert and More

B. Spinach Basil Pesto

Ingredients:

- 2 cups packed fresh basil leaves
- 1 cup packed fresh baby spinach leaves
- 1 cup pine nuts (or walnuts)
- ¾ cup fresh finely grated parmesan cheese
- 2 garlic cloves
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- Pinch of red pepper flakes (optional)
- 1 tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- Freshly ground pepper to taste

Method:

1. In the bowl of a food processor fitted with a steel blade, pulse the basil, spinach, salt, pepper, and garlic cloves until broken up.
2. Add the pine nuts (or walnuts) and process 10-15 seconds.
3. Add the parmesan cheese, place the top back on, and while the processor is running, slowly pour the olive oil in through the feeder tube until all is incorporated. Adjust seasoning for salt and pepper if needed.

HAPPY MOM LIFE LAB

12 Best Summer Recipes: Salads, Cocktails, Dinners, Dessert and More

Notes:

- These pesto's freeze beautifully! Double or triple the batch to keep on hand for easy dinners. I usually freeze them in small glass ball jars or using an ice cube tray (once frozen, remove them from the tray and keep frozen in a ziplock freezer bag)
- The pesto's will keep in the fridge for about a week if not frozen for later use.
- Pesto is a great alternative to use as pizza sauce, drizzled over omelets, mixed with sour cream or greek yogurt for a dip, used as a pasta sauce, or mixed into salad dressings.
- The sun dried tomato olive pesto is especially delicious mixed into a brick of cream cheese to make a spread to put on a cheese plate, or spread onto a flour tortilla for a sandwich wrap.
- The spinach basil pesto does have an earthly taste at first but mellows down quite a bit over time.
- The top of the pesto will brown quickly, so when storing in the fridge or freezer, place a teaspoon or two of olive oil over the top to cover which will help prevent the browning.
- Need it dairy free? Just omit the cheeses to make it a vegan.
- Pine nuts can easily be substituted with walnuts or almonds. For deeper flavor, you can toast the nuts in a 350 degree oven for 8 minutes or until lightly toasted. Just make sure your nuts are fully cooled before processing into the pesto.

HAPPY MOM LIFE LAB

12 Best Summer Recipes: Salads, Cocktails, Dinners, Dessert and More

#4 - Fresh Watermelon and Blueberry Salad

Prep time: 15-20 minutes
Makes: 4-6 as a side dish
Pairs well with: grilled chicken or steak, and a crisp white win

Ingredients:

- 6 Cups of watermelon chopped into a 1 inch dice
- ¼ cup coarsely chopped fresh mint leaves
- 3 oz. feta cheese, crumbled
- 2 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
- 3 Tbsp fresh lime juice
- 1 cup fresh blueberries
- 1 tsp. Maldon sea salt

Method:

1. In a large bowl, add your chopped watermelon, chopped mint leaves, and blueberries.
2. In a small bowl whisk together the olive oil and lime juice.
3. Pour it over the watermelon mixture, add the sea salt, and mix well until fully coated.
4. Gently fold in the crumbled feta cheese.

Notes:

- I find the smaller personal sized watermelons taste much sweeter and yield the perfect amount of cut fruit for this dish, however this recipe can easily be doubled to accommodate using a larger watermelon.
- This salad is best served right away, but can be made up to an hour in advance, however not much longer as the lime will start to break it down.
- If mixed too much, the crumbled feta will start to coat the watermelon, so if you leave the feta in bigger chunks and gently fold it in right before serving, the watermelon will keep its vibrant color.
- Kosher salt can easily be substituted for the Maldon sea salt.

HAPPY MOM LIFE LAB

12 Best Summer Recipes: Salads, Cocktails, Dinners, Dessert and More

#5 - Strawberry Avocado Spring Salad

Prep time: 25 minutes
Makes: 6-8 people as a side salad
Pairs well with: Frittatas or egg casseroles, brunch dishes, and roast chicken

For the Salad:

- Two 10 ounces of bags of cut up hearts of Romaine lettuce
- One 5 ounces bag of Spring Mix lettuce
- 2 avocados, diced
- ½ cup sliced green onion, white and green parts
- ½ cup crumbled gorgonzola cheese
- 1 ½ cups sliced fresh strawberries
- 1 cup rough chopped sweet/ spicy pecans (recipe follows)

For the Dressing:

- 1 cup extra virgin olive oil
- ½ cup red wine vinegar
- 4 tsp Dijon mustard
- 4 tsp granulated sugar
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 2 tsp kosher salt

Sweet and Spicy Pecans:

- ¼ cup powdered sugar
- ½ tsp kosher salt
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- A pinch of cayenne
- 4 ounces of Pecans
- 2 tsp of water

12 Best Summer Recipes: Salads, Cocktails, Dinners, Dessert and More

To make the Sweet and Spicy Pecans:

Preheat your oven to 350 degrees. In a bowl, make a slurry with the powdered sugar, salt, cinnamon, cayenne and water. Add the pecans and stir, coating the pecans well. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and spread the mixture evenly onto the pan. Bake for 10-12 minutes. Once out of the oven, immediately slide the parchment paper with the nuts off of the pan so the sugar doesn't dry onto the pan. Let cool, and chop roughly.

To make the dressing:

Add all of the dressing ingredients to a blender or small food processor and blend until creamy. This is important to emulsify all of the ingredients together.

To assemble the salad:

In a large bowl, toss your lettuce with the amount of dressing of your liking to coat the leaves well, but not too soggy. Transfer your dressed lettuce into a serving bowl, and add the rest of the salad ingredients. Sprinkle the sweet and spicy pecans over the top, and serve.

Notes:

- The dressing can be made and refrigerated up to 5 days ahead, just give it a good shake before you dress your salad.
- Short on time? Buy your sweet and spicy pecans instead! Trader Joes has a great selection of nuts to choose from to add crunch to this salad.
- Feta is a great substitute for the gorgonzola if you are not a fan of blue cheese
- Making the sweet and spicy pecans? Double the recipe, these nuts are great for snacking and go with most salads for a touch of protein.
- Prep your salad ingredients up to a day ahead of time, and toss it all together before company comes.

HAPPY MOM LIFE LAB

12 Best Summer Recipes: Salads, Cocktails, Dinners, Dessert and More

#6 - Ultimate Turkey Burgers

Prep time: 15 minutes
Serves: 4-6 people
Pairs well with: potato chips, beer, french fries, and brown beans

Turkey burger ingredients:

- 1.5 lbs. ground turkey (93% lean, if possible)
- ¼ Cup panko crumbs
- 2 Tbsp. pickle juice brine (or water if you don't have pickle brine)
- 1 Tbsp. finely grated parmesan
- 2 Tbsp. Dijon mustard
- 2 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tsp. garlic powder
- 2 tsp. kosher salt
- ¼ tsp. fresh ground pepper
- 3 scallions, finely sliced

Burger toppings:

- Pepper Jack cheese slices
- Fried eggs over easy
- Dill pickle slices
- Sliced tomatoes
- Crispy fried onions such as French's
- Shredded iceberg lettuce
- 4-6 sesame burger buns

Burger sauce:

- ½ Cup mayo
- 2 Tbsp. ketchup
- 1 Tbsp. yellow mustard
- 2 Tbsp. sweet pickle relish
- ¼ tsp. smoked paprika

12 Best Summer Recipes: Salads, Cocktails, Dinners, Dessert and More

Method:

1. Make your burger patties while you preheat your grill. In a medium sized bowl, add in your panko crumbs and pickle brine. Give it a good couple stirs so the crumbs absorb the liquid.
2. Next, add your ground turkey to the mix, parmesan cheese, Dijon, Worcestershire sauce , garlic powder, salt, pepper and scallions.
3. Mix well, using your hands to incorporate all of the ingredients without overworking it, and form into 4 to 6 burger patties.
4. Place your patties onto your preheated grill and cook until a thermometer inserted in the middle reaches 165 degrees. Once done, add your pepper jack cheese slices on top of each patty and keep on the grill until the cheese is melted which shouldn't take long.
5. While your burgers are busy grilling, make the sauce by mixing all of the burger sauce ingredients together in a small bowl. Set aside.
6. In a nonstick skillet, fry your eggs in a 2 tsp of vegetable oil and keep warm in the oven until ready to assemble your burger.
7. To assemble, toast your burger buns, slather with sauce, add your cheesy grilled turkey patties, fried egg, and other burger toppings. Serve with fries or chips and enjoy!

Notes:

- Try not to use ultra lean ground turkey as it will dry out quickly on the grill. 93% lean should be the leanest you use.
- The burger sauce can also double as a yummy fry sauce, so make extra to dip your fries in.
- When making the patties, double the recipe to freeze some patties for later as the uncooked patties freeze well. Just make sure to defrost fully in the fridge before grilling.
- Pickle juice brine is just the juice from a jar of pickles, so you probably already have it in your fridge or pantry. It gives the burgers a mystery flavor that seasons the burgers so well, very tasty!

HAPPY MOM LIFE LAB

12 Best Summer Recipes: Salads, Cocktails, Dinners, Dessert and More

#7 - Crockpot White Chicken Chili

Prep time: 20 minutes
Serves: 6-8 people
Pairs well with: cornbread, tortilla chips, and a cold beer

Garnish:

- sliced avocado
- crumbled cotija cheese
- crushed tortilla chips
- sour cream
- chopped cilantro

Ingredients:

- 3 cups diced onion
- 4 cloves of garlic, minced
- 2 lbs. boneless, skinless chicken thighs
- 2 cans (4 oz. each) diced green chilies, mild
- 2 cans (15 oz. each) cannellini beans, drained and rinsed (divided, see below)
- 1 can (15 oz.) garbanzo beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 cup frozen (or canned) corn kernels
- 4 cups chicken broth (divided, see below)
- 1 tsp. ground cumin
- ¼ tsp. ground chipotle powder
- ¼ tsp smoked paprika
- ¼ tsp. chili powder
- 1 tsp. kosher salt

12 Best Summer Recipes: Salads, Cocktails, Dinners, Dessert and More

Method:

1. In a blender or mini food processor, blend ½ cup of the chicken broth with half of your prepared cannellini beans (15 oz.), and puree. This will act as a natural thickener for your chili. Reserve the rest of the chicken broth and cannellini beans for the chili.
2. In a crock pot, put your chicken thighs in first, and then add your pureed chicken broth/bean mixture.
3. Add in the rest of your ingredients, including the reserved chicken broth and cannellini beans.
4. Cook on high heat for 6 hours.
5. With tongs, grab the chicken out of the pot (it should be fully cooked through), and shred it with a fork, then return it to the chili pot.
6. Cook on low another hour or so, until the flavors have melded together.
7. Serve, and garnish with crushed tortilla chips, avocado, cilantro, and other toppings of your choice.

Notes:

- This chili freezes well, feel free to freeze in lunch sized portions to enjoy all season long.
- If you are short on time, you can skip blending the chicken broth/cannellini beans step, and just dump it all into the crock pot. Your chili will be thinner with a more soup like consistency, but still delicious.
- This makes a milder chili, so if spicy is your thing, double up on the chipotle powder, smoked paprika and chili powder for a spicier dish.
- No Crockpot? No problem! You can make this on the stovetop by roasting your chicken in the oven first. Get the rest of the chili ingredients simmering on the stovetop while the chicken is roasting, then when the chicken is done, shred it, and add it to the rest of the ingredients and simmer on low for an hour or so to deepen the flavors. Or, to make it even easier, use a store bought rotisserie chicken instead.

HAPPY MOM LIFE LAB

12 Best Summer Recipes: Salads, Cocktails, Dinners, Dessert and More

#8 - Low Country Boil with Creamy Cocktail Dipping Sauce

Prep time: 25 minutes
Makes: 4 people
Pairs well with: crusty French bread, lemon wedges, and a dry white wine

Low Country Boil Ingredients:

- 1 lb. Shrimp, peeled and deveined, with the tails left on (optional to leave tails on)
- 1 lb. multicolored small baby potatoes (purple, red, gold)
- 12 oz. Cajun style Andouille sausages, each sausage, cut into thirds
- 4 ears of fresh corn, shucked, each ear cut into thirds
- 3 oz. box of Crawfish, crab & shrimp boil packet, such as Zatarain's
- 4 oz. melted salted butter for serving (optional)
- 2 lemons, cut into wedges for serving (optional)

Creamy Cocktail Dipping sauce Ingredients:

- 1/2 Cup mayonnaise
- 2 Tbsp. Ketchup
- 1 Tbsp. Sweet relish
- 1 Tbsp. lemon juice
- 1 garlic clove, pressed
- 1 tsp. prepared horseradish
- ½ tsp. Worcestershire sauce
- ½ tsp. Smoked paprika
- ½ tsp. old bay seasoning
- ½ tsp. sriracha sauce (optional)

12 Best Summer Recipes: Salads, Cocktails, Dinners, Dessert and More

Method:

1. Fill a large stockpot halfway with water, salt the water, and bring to a boil over high heat.
2. Once at a boil, add in your potatoes and shrimp boil packet, reduce the heat a little, and boil uncovered for 15 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, make your creamy cocktail sauce by mixing together the ingredients in a small bowl. Set aside.
4. After your boil has been boiling for 15 minutes, add in your corn and Cajun Andouille sausages and boil for another ten minutes.
5. Finally, add in your peeled and deveined shrimp and boil for another 5-8 minutes or until the potatoes are just fork tender, and the shrimp is pink throughout.
6. Drain your pot, or, with a slotted spoon, turn your low country boil onto a big serving platter and garnish with your lemon slices.
7. Serve hot with melted butter to dip in, your creamy cocktail sauce, slices of crusty French bread, and lemon wedges to squeeze over your dinner, and enjoy!

Notes:

- This recipe can easily be doubled, just make sure you buy two packs of boil seasoning to season your boil with.
- Make sure to salt your water! This will bring flavor to your dish to compliment the shrimp boil seasoning packet.
- If you are not a fan of mayonnaise, you can serve with purchased red cocktail sauce for an even easier dish.
- Red potatoes can replace the potato medley, just do not use russets, as they will be too soft for this dish.
- Feel free to add crab legs, mussels, or clams to this dish, just make sure to clean them well and add them at the end being careful not to overcook.
- This dish is so much fun to feed your family seated around a huge platter with no plates, just personal dipping sauce/butter and a table lined with (clean) newspapers for ease of clean up. The ultimate summertime dish!

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12 Best Summer Recipes: Salads, Cocktails, Dinners, Dessert and More

#9 - Grilled Pork Chops with Quick Marinade

Prep time: 15-10 minutes
Serves: 4 people
Pairs well with: seasonal sides like grilled veggies or salads in warmer months, and Kaiserschmarrn or mashed potatoes with apple sauce in colder months

Ingredients:

- 3/4 Cup lightly packed dark brown sugar
- 1/2 Cup kosher salt (or 1/4 Cup table salt)
- 3 Heaping Tbsp. pre-chopped garlic (jars usually in produce area or spice aisle) or 10 medium fresh garlic cloves, crushed
- 4 bay leaves, crumbled
- 8 whole cloves
- 3 Tbsp. whole black peppercorns, crushed
- 4–1 inch thick bone-in rib loin pork chops (about 2 pounds total) or 4 boneless chops (reduce cook time)
- 2 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
- Ground black pepper

12 Best Summer Recipes: Salads, Cocktails, Dinners, Dessert and More

Method:

1. Using a gallon-size ziplock bag sitting inside a medium-large bowl, carefully pour 2 cups hot water on top of sugar and salt. Seal the bag very well and swirl the water mix around until everything is dissolved.
2. Put the bag back in the bowl, open and add the garlic, bay leaves, cloves, peppercorns, and 4 cups cold water; cool the mixture to room temperature. Add the pork chops, then seal bag, pressing out as much air as possible and lightly turn the bag a few times to distribute spices.
3. Place bowl in refrigerator for 1/2 hour, then turn the bag over making sure spices are redistributed for another 1/2 hour (or until the chops are fully seasoned). Adjust brining time depending on thickness of pork.
4. Remove the chops from the brine, rinse quickly, and dry thoroughly with paper towels.
5. Pre-heat your grill with all burners on high with the lid closed for about 15 minutes then reduce heat to medium just before grilling.
6. Rub the chops with oil and sprinkle with pepper to taste.
7. Grill the chops about 3 minutes on each size, while loosely covered with foil or an aluminum pan, over the hottest part of the grill until browned, about 3 minutes on each side. Move the chops to the cooler part of the grill (either reduce heat for side sections or place in your grill's naturally cooler side/back areas). Continue grilling, covered, turning once, until an instant-read thermometer inserted through the side of a chop and away from the bone registers 130-135 degrees, 5 to 7 minutes longer.
8. Transfer the chops to a platter; cover loosely with foil (do not wrap foil tightly around meat), and let rest about 5 minutes. Internal temperature should rise to 145 degrees while resting. Serve immediately.

HAPPY MOM LIFE LAB

12 Best Summer Recipes: Salads, Cocktails, Dinners, Dessert and More

Notes:

- A must have item for any kitchen is a great thermometer. I've tried around 10 different ones (high and low end) and I swear by this one. Get it and throw the rest away!
- Every grill is a bit different so the key is to adjust in order to achieve the resting temp of 145 degrees. In almost all cases, sear 3 minutes per side regardless of thickness or bone-in/bone-out and instead adjust the timing for the off-center grilling/not high heat cook time.
- Boneless chops work well too, although they're not quite as flavorful; note they're often not 1" thick so key to remember to reduce the total brining time as well in the ratio of 1" = 1 hour as well as the cook time.
- Buying spices in bulk grocery store area is best for saving money and keeping spices fresh since you avoid having excess sitting for months.
- You may opt to use only sugar and salt in the brine and skip the other flavorings if you are using a different spice rub or if serving with a bold sauce, but I've found that the spice combo above works well with many different dish combos and is less overpowering than most spice rubs.
- Winter menu suggestion (yes, we still gas grill in Winter but oven broiling is an option if you can't): Homemade apple sauce is a major win—so easy and so much tastier than store bought plus using a hand blender creates a perfectly smooth sauce! A shortcut is warming good organic, lower sugar apple sauce in a jar on the stove and then blending it. Also, a German au pair introduced us to Kaiserschmarrn as a starchy side for pork chops along with homemade apple sauce is heavenly! I've yet to find the Kaiserschmarrn recipe as good as her mental recipe, but there are lots to choose from on the internet so try a few to suit your taste. And yes, it sounds weird to have a dessert type side but trust me that it's beyond delicious! Try mashed potatoes instead of Kaiserschmarrn too.
- Summer menu suggestion: fruit salsas or pico de gallo pair so well with this marinade, as do grilled veggies and summer salads.
- Leftover suggestion: freeze remaining pork for use in this delicious fried rice recipe.

HAPPY MOM LIFE LAB

12 Best Summer Recipes: Salads, Cocktails, Dinners, Dessert and More

#10 - Summer Spaghetti

Prep time: 25 minutes
Serves: 4-6 people
Pairs well with: crisp Pinot Grigio and a crusty French bread

Ingredients:

- ½ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 6 garlic cloves, minced
- ¼ tsp. red pepper flakes
- 12 oz. spaghetti noodles
- 1 cup kalamata olives, halved
- 2 medium fresh heirloom tomatoes, diced in 1 inch pieces
- 3 Tbsp. capers, minced
- 1 cup jarred grilled artichoke hearts, halved
- 1 cup fresh mini mozzarella balls (can also sub with crumbled fresh feta)
- ½ lemon
- ¼ cup each minced fresh basil and parsley
- Kosher salt and pepper to taste

12 Best Summer Recipes: Salads, Cocktails, Dinners, Dessert and More

Method:

1. In a small saucepan over low-medium heat, slowly warm the olive oil, minced garlic cloves, and red pepper flakes. When the mixture starts to gently sizzle, stir frequently, 1-2 minutes until the garlic is just lightly golden brown, then remove from heat. Watch carefully as the garlic can burn quickly! Let cool and steep while you fix the rest of the dish.
2. Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to a boil. Cook spaghetti in the boiling water, stirring occasionally with a fork to break up the clumps, until firm to the bite and cooked through, about 10-12 minutes. Drain, rinse well with cold water to cool the noodles, then transfer to a large bowl.
3. To your cooled spaghetti, add the diced tomatoes, kalamata olives, artichoke hearts, capers, fresh parsley and basil, and mini mozzarella balls (or feta, if using).
4. Pour your garlic/olive oil mixture over the top of the spaghetti mixture, squeeze the juice of your lemon half over it, and give it a big stir to incorporate all of the ingredients.
5. Finish with freshly ground pepper and salt to taste.

Notes:

- This dish is best served the day of, leftovers will hold ok in the fridge, but the tomatoes may get soft.
- Like many pasta dishes, the heavy ingredients like to go sink to the bottom of the bowl, so give it a big hearty stir right before serving.
- This is easily customizable to your taste! Roasted red peppers, crumbled goat cheese, or sautéed zucchini can easily substitute or add to the artichoke hearts, capers, or cheeses.
- Heirloom tomatoes can be replaced by cherry or grape tomatoes if not in season.

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12 Best Summer Recipes: Salads, Cocktails, Dinners, Dessert and More

#11 - Summer Berry Trifle with Limoncello Whip Cream

Prep time: 25 minutes, plus 1 hour baking time
Serves: 6-8 people
Pairs well with: A crisp Pinot Grigio, or sparkling white wine

For the Pound Cake:

- 1 cup unsalted butter, softened
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 4 eggs, room temperature
- 2 cups all purpose flour
- 1 ½ tsp. baking powder
- ¾ tsp Kosher salt
- ½ cup buttermilk, room temperature
- 1 Tbsp dry sherry (optional, see notes)
- 1 tsp pure vanilla extract

For the Limoncello Mascarpone Cream:

- 2 cups whipping cream
- 4 oz mascarpone
- 3 Tbsp Limoncello
- ¼ tsp lemon extract
- 1/3 cup powdered sugar

For the Fruit:

- 2 cups sliced fresh strawberries
- 1 ½ tsp granulated sugar
- ¼ tsp lemon extract
- 1 ½ cups fresh blueberries

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To Make your Pound Cake:

1. Preheat your oven to 350 degrees and lightly grease a 9 inch nonstick loaf pan.
2. Using a stand mixer or a hand held mixer, cream together the softened butter and the granulated sugar.
3. One by one, beat in the eggs, scraping down the sides as needed so everything is incorporated.
4. Add in the flour, baking powder and kosher salt, then add in the buttermilk, dry sherry and vanilla until everything is mixed nicely.
5. Pour into your prepared pan and bake in the middle rack of your oven for 60-70 minutes, or until the top is nicely browned and a cake tester inserted in the middle comes out clean.
6. Remove from oven and let cool about an hour or so before turning it out of the pan. To help the release, take a butter knife and gently run the perimeter of the cake to loosen the sides away from the pan.

To Make the Berries:

In a small bowl, add the sliced strawberries with the 1 tsp. of sugar and lemon extract, and let macerate while you make the limoncello mascarpone cream. You can add in the blueberries if you like, or keep them unsweetened.

To Make The Mascarpone Limoncello Cream:

With a stand mixer fitted with a whisk or using a hand mixer, whip the heavy whipping cream until very soft peaks start to form. Stop the mixer and add in the mascarpone, limoncello, lemon extract, and powdered sugar and whip until thickened, being careful not to over whip.

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To Assemble:

In small dessert bowls, place a dollop of the Limoncello cream on the bottom, add some berries and cubed up pound cake and top with another dollop of cream, and enjoy!

Notes:

- To make this even quicker, use a store bought pound cake (or angel food cake!), so all you need to do is make the limoncello cream, slice the berries, and assemble.
- Play with the berry mixture to your liking! Sub fresh peaches for the strawberries, or add in blackberries, you can easily customize this.
- This cake freezes beautifully, I usually double the cake recipe and make two loaves, one to freeze for a quick dessert later, and one to use.
- The dry sherry in the pound cake recipe really balances the flavors of the cake, but you can substitute it for rum, or almond extract with tasty results.
- You can make the limoncello cream earlier in the day, just keep it refrigerated until you are ready to assemble the trifles.
- The limoncello cream has a light boozy flavor, with the lemon extract lifting up the lemon flavors slightly to enhance. Feel free to omit the lemon extract to lighten the lemon flavoring if you'd like.

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#12 - Frozen Bananas

Prep time: 2-3 hours to freeze the bananas, 15 minutes to dip and top them
Serves: 12 people

Ingredients:

- 4 medium sized bananas, cut equally into thirds
- 2 Cups semi-sweet chocolate chips
- 12 wooden popsicle sticks
- Topping options: mini M&M's, mini chocolate chips, rainbow sprinkles, shredded coconut, chopped candied ginger (my favorite!), crushed graham crackers, chopped hazelnuts, crushed potato chips, chocolate sprinkles, crushed Butterfinger candy bar (another favorite!), crushed cracker jacks

Method:

1. Cut each of the four bananas equally into thirds, and place them on a parchment lined sheet pan. Gently insert a Popsicle stick halfway into the end of each banana, being careful not to split the banana.
2. Set your bananas into the freezer and freeze them for about an hour or until frozen. This helps set the Popsicle stick so it doesn't slide out when you dip the banana into the chocolate.Remove from oven and let cool about an hour or so before turning it out of the pan. To help the release, take a butter knife and gently run the perimeter of the cake to loosen the sides away from the pan.

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3. When you are about ready to dip you bananas into the chocolate, set up your topping station and make sure to have all of your topping ingredients ready first, as you will have to work quickly to top them before the chocolate sets. This is important!
4. In a 2 cup Pyrex glass measuring cup, melt down your chocolate chips for one minute, stir, then in 20 second increments until just fully melted and glossy when stirred.
5. Take your sheet pan with the bananas out of the freezer, and place next to your dipping station. Dip the frozen banana into the melted chocolate, and immediately sprinkle it with your desired topping, and set it back onto the parchment lined sheet pan. Repeat for all the bananas.
6. Place your dipped bananas back into the freezer and freeze for another hour or so, then gently place them into a gallon zip lock bag and store in the freezer for up to one month.

Notes:

- These are best using bananas that are just about ripe, meaning no green, and little to no brown spots on the skin.
- If you are using larger bananas, you will need more chocolate, so add a generous handful of chocolate chips to the two cups of chocolate chips before melting them all down in the microwave.
- Feel free to use a double boiler over the stovetop to melt down your chocolate instead of using the microwave.
- Mix and match your toppings! Favorite combos in our house are: mini chocolate chips/graham cracker crumbs, shredded coconut/crushed hazelnut, candied ginger/ crushed potato chips. Use your imagination; this is a very forgiving dessert!
- These keep well in the freezer, a great treat to have at the ready. The bananas, however, will turn brown quickly if left out for too long, so they are best enjoyed about 10-15 minutes after you pull them from the freezer.
- Make a huge batch and munch on these all summer long!

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