

Wine-Inspired Italian Buffet

Holiday Flavors Delight

By Staci Scheurenbrand

Recipes by Tom White

Photography by Dean Tanner and Katie Downery

Do you crave fuss-free holidays, light-hearted entertaining and special meals? An inviting home filled with family, friends and festive flavors is the perfect way to celebrate the magic of the season. Our wine-inspired Italian buffet sets the stage with Spinach Pesto Lasagna that is showy enough for special guests, but comes together in a snap, leaving you more time for relaxed holiday moments.

Even if you don't make everything from scratch it's not cheating, it's good strategy! So this holiday season you pick the occasion and whether you serve buffet-style or break out the good dishes, our Make-It/Buy-It strategy helps you entertain with ease.

Make-It

Focaccia Bread With Olives

1 package active dry yeast
1/4 cup warm water
3 1/2 cups flour
1 teaspoon salt
1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil
1/4 cup dry white wine
1 cup pitted, chopped green olives
2 tablespoons chopped fresh rosemary
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Dissolve yeast in warm water, about 10 minutes. Mix flour and salt in a large bowl. Add yeast mixture. Mix with a wooden spoon until a soft paste is formed. Cover and let stand 30 minutes. Add the 1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil and the wine. Mix to a sticky dough.
2. Turn dough out onto a lightly floured surface. Knead until smooth and elastic. Gently work olives into the dough. Place in a lightly buttered bowl. Cover; let rise till double in size, about 2 hours.
3. Punch dough down. Knead 5 minutes. Let stand 10 minutes. Roll dough out onto a lightly floured surface to form a circle, about two inches thick. Place dough on a greased baking sheet. Cover, let rise 1 hour. Brush top of dough with the 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil. Gently press fingertips into dough to form soft dimples. Sprinkle with rosemary. Bake for 30 minutes or until golden brown.

MAKES ONE LOAF

La Vida Loca Garlic Wine Bread Dip

1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil

1/4 cup La Vida Loca Garlic Wine

1 tablespoon crushed fresh rosemary, plus extra for garnish, if you like.

1. Combine oil and wine and whisk vigorously. (Garnish optional). Serve with Focaccia Bread With Olives.

All-Natural Bread Dip

Here's a simple, great-tasting, non-alcohol dipping oil. It also makes a fantastic marinade for beef or poultry.

Iowa Natural Soy Oil is the main ingredient. Start with the amount you need and to your taste, add Parmesan cheese, fresh ground black pepper and herbs. Whisk vigorously.

Iowa Natural Soy Oil

Parmesan cheese

Fresh ground black pepper

Garlic powder

Onion powder

Ground thyme

Ground oregano

Buy-It

Crusty artisan breads, garlic breadsticks and flatbreads are perfect stand-ins when you don't have time to make homemade bread.

Keep bottled dipping oils or powdered dipping mixes on hand. These indulgent dips are also perfect for last minute entertaining and impromptu guests.

Make-It

Antipasto

Meat: prosciutto and mortadella

Cheese: provolone, mozzarella, Gorgonzola

Figs

Olives

There's no right or wrong way to arrange antipasto, and you can mix/match meats and cheeses to suit your taste. Chef Tom went for the layered look by placing prosciutto flat on a serving tray and topping with layers of provolone and mozzarella. Rolled mortadella was accessorized with star-cut figs, olives and a hunk of Gorgonzola in the middle. For a fun holiday twist, roll meats and spear with festive picks.

Buy-It

Prep your pantry with jars of marinated artichoke hearts, pepperoncini, sun-dried tomatoes, roasted peppers and savory biscotti. Add some sliced or diced cheeses, drizzle with olive oil and you've got a lovely antipasto in no time.

Make-It

Spinach Pesto Lasagna with 4 Cheeses

1 recipe Spinach Pistachio Pesto (below)

9 sheets whole grain lasagna noodles

8 ounces ricotta cheese

4 ounces non-smoked provolone cheese, sliced or cubed

1 cup shredded Parmesan cheese

1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese

Prepared marinara sauce (optional)

1. Preheat oven to 275 degrees. Boil lasagna noodles according to package directions, but cut cook time by half. Rinse with cold water. Drain well.
2. Place three sheets of the cooked lasagna noodles in a 2-quart rectangular baking dish sprayed with non-stick cooking spray. Spread with the ricotta cheese. Top with the provolone, mozzarella and one-half cup of the Parmesan. Top with three more sheets of lasagna noodles. Top with pesto. Place remaining lasagna noodles over pesto. Sprinkle with remaining Parmesan. Bake uncovered 35-40 minutes. If you like, top with warmed marinara sauce.

MAKES 6-8 SERVINGS

Spinach Pistachio Pesto

8-9 ounces washed and drained fresh spinach
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
3/4 cup shelled pistachios

1. Place the above ingredients in a food processor. Process until smooth and set aside or chill until ready to use, up to two weeks.

MAKES ABOUT ONE CUP

Buy-It

Purchase prepared pesto, which comes in a variety of flavors to suit your individual taste. You'll need one cup for this recipe.

A simple tossed salad of mixed baby greens and a drizzle of vinaigrette is a lovely addition to this inviting Italian meal.

Wine Suggestions:

Pair this rustic Italian buffet with Midnight Rain from Madison County Winery, St. Charles, Iowa. The winemaker says, "Midnight Rain is a ruby red, medium-bodied, softly dry red wine with a fruity finish".

"Don't cook with wines you wouldn't drink is good advice when cooking flavor-rich meals," says Chef Tom White. He used La Vida Loca cooking wines when creating these recipes.

The aroma of mulled wine issues a special welcome to guests. Check with local wineries to pair wines and mulling spices for a warm and delectable treat.

Dolce

Make-It

Tiramisu with La Vida Loca Cinnamon Wine

8 ounces mascarpone cheese
1/3 cup sugar
1/3 cup La Vida Loca Cinnamon Wine
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 1/2 cups whipping cream
24 dried ladyfingers
1 cup very strong brewed black coffee
4 ounces grated semisweet chocolate

1. In large bowl, beat mascarpone cheese and sugar until creamy. Beat in wine and vanilla. In a chilled bowl, using chilled beaters beat whipping cream at medium speed until stiff peaks form. Fold whipped cream into mascarpone mixture.

2. To assemble, lay 8 ladyfingers in the bottom of an 8x8 glass baking dish, glass bowl or trifle dish. Drizzle with one-third of the brewed coffee. Spoon one-third of the mascarpone mixture on top. Repeat layering two more times. Sprinkle with the 4 ounces of grated chocolate. Cover and chill at least 6 hours before serving.

MAKES 8-10 SERVINGS

Buy-It

Italian Sweets

Panettone (cake filled with candied fruit) is traditional Italian Christmas bread that is well suited for dessert. Look for it at specialty stores or in the gourmet section of your local supermarket.

Make-It

Savory Cookies with Lemon and Rosemary

3/4 cup yellow cornmeal
1 1/2 cups white flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 cup butter
1 cup sugar
2 eggs
2 tablespoons port-style wine
2 tablespoons lemon zest
2 tablespoons chopped fresh rosemary

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In large mixing bowl, combine dry ingredients with the rosemary. In a small bowl, cream butter and sugar until fluffy. Add eggs, then wine, then lemon zest. Add to dry ingredients; mix well.

2. Drop dough by rounded spoonfuls 2 inches apart on a greased baking sheet. Bake 7-8 minutes or till edges are lightly brown.

| MAKES ABOUT TWO DOZEN COOKIES

Buy-It

Italian Cookies

Amaretti, the Italian name for macaroons, are made from either ground almonds or almond paste. Crisp on the outside and soft inside, Amaretti are traditionally served with a sweet dessert wine or liqueur, and they are sometimes wrapped in colorful paper—perfect for holiday celebrations!

Make-It

Poached Pears

1/2 cup water

1/2 cup port-style wine

1 cup sugar

4 Bosch pears

Fresh mint (optional)

1. In large saucepan, add water, port wine and sugar. Bring to boiling. Stir until sugar is dissolved. Reduce heat to low.
2. Peel the pears. Using a melon ball cutter, remove pear core from the bottom of the pear, leaving the stem intact. Carefully place pears into the saucepan and simmer in port sauce until pears are just tender, and port sauce is reduced by half; about 20 minutes.
3. Serve immediately or cover and chill up to 48-hours. Pears may be served warm or cold. If you like, garnish with fresh mint just before serving.

MAKES FOUR SERVINGS

Make-It

Marinated Fruit

Peeled, sliced peaches marinated in La Vida Loca Cinnamon Wine makes a luscious topping for ice cream, pound cake, and angel food cake—just about anything! Simply slice peaches, drizzle with Cinnamon Wine and chill 1 hour. For a non-alcohol version, sprinkle peaches with a dusting of cinnamon before serving.

How to: Have Fun and Relax

When it comes to centerpieces, don't stress...impress!

There are plenty of ways to gussy up the holiday table without shopping for extra decorations. Start by walking through your home and collecting a few odds and ends. Add some sparkle (or not) and see what you come up with. Here are a few ideas to get you started.

- Natural treasures such as live clippings of fresh holly, pine, boxwood or other seasonal plants* make a fresh and festive statement. Tie with red ribbon and scatter around the table with fresh or dried berries, or gather a bunch and place in an attractive vase or basket.
- Old greeting cards, photo cards and pinecones all make great place card holders. If using pinecones, a nicely shaped, round pinecone works best and it should be fully open. Glue place card directly on to the pinecone with a hot glue gun, or use thin floral wire to keep the card in place.
- Favorite holiday mementos scattered around the table add history, grace and conversation to the meal.
- Surprise guests by placing favorite photos in festive frames. It's a unique addition to your tablescape and a heartwarming takeaway.
- A parade of nutcrackers intertwined with bowls of woody-shelled nuts is decorative and delicious.
- Mix, but don't match, all those partially used candles and cluster them together on a pretty tray. Fill in the gaps with fancies such as scraps of ribbon, bits of tinsel or small decorative balls.
- Create your own wine tree! Wire a variety of stemmed glasses (not your best crystal!) such as wine goblets, champagne flutes or cocktail glasses to the branches upside down to look like bells. Plug in the lights and see it glisten.

*When using fresh plants or berries, keep poisonous items away from food, children and pets.

One More Thing: Take the Pressure Off with Our Time Saver Tips:

1. Dress the table before guests arrive. Select centerpieces and candles, and prep dinnerware and serving pieces in advance to ensure everything sparkles when placed on the table.
2. If you're entertaining in the kitchen, keep it neat and tidy by carefully stacking dirty dishes in a plastic bin; tuck away until ready to wash.

3. Thaw meats, and prepare pans and baking dishes ahead of time.
4. Wash, iron and fold linens ahead of time.
5. When using fruit in recipes, check availability and ripeness 2-3 days in advance to ensure what you need is available.
6. During the holidays, special cuts of meat go quickly. Check your recipes and order your cuts from the butcher in advance.
7. Avoid messy piles of coats on the furniture, and clear out the coat closet or designate an out-of-the-way spot for coats/wraps.
8. Sharing leftovers is half the fun of entertaining. Stock up on disposable containers ahead of time to avoid sending your dishes home with guests.

Holiday Flavors Delight

Holiday Entertaining Ideas from the Fall/Holiday 2008 issue of *Make Mine Wine*.

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How To: Ringing it in Right

Deck: For New Year's Eve Decorating, Go for the Glitz!

To create a showy, winter wonderland look, we sought out the help of Pat Taylor from Taylor Floral and Gifts in Indianola, Iowa. Pat started with a beautiful glass vase that resembled a large wine glass. Next, she carefully placed silver balls in the bottom and tucked sparkly branches here and there. For added flair, Pat twisted beaded garland around the base. You'll find lovely, unique gifts and decorating ideas to build upon at Taylor Floral and Gifts. 105 West Salem Avenue, Indianola, Iowa 50125 (515) 961-6011.

Designer Notes

Entertaining with Wine Section

Pages 32 – 39

Photos: Italian Buffet, Antipasto, Tirasmu, Centerpiece

Ads: La Vida Loca, Celebrity Food & Wine Show, Summerset, MMW Blog, State of Iowa Wine Brochures

Page 32 & 33

Title over grey on right side of Italian Buffet photo – if it looks good

Italian Buffet Photo spread over page 32 & 33

Intro on far right – 63 words

Page 34

Deck – 41 words

Make-It, Bake-It Breads and Dips – 375 words

La Vida Loca Ad – 1/8 page we create

Page 35

Photo: Antipasto

½ Page ad for Celebrity Food & Wine Show

Make-It, Bake-It Antipasto – 120 words

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Lasagna, Pesto and wine recommendations

1 photo – Midnight Rain wine

½ page ad for Summerset

Make-It, Bake-It Antipasto – 327 words

Page 37

Dolce

1 photo – Tirasmu

No Ads

Make-It, Bake-It Tirasmu, Cookies, Pears, Peaches- 511 words

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How To: Have Fun and Relax

No photos

1 ad – MMW Blog

Deck: - 7 words

Centerpiece Copy - 297

Subdeck – 12 words

Plan Ahead Tips – 166 words

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How To: Ringing it in Right

One Photo – Centerpiece

1 ad – ½ State of Iowa Wine Brochure

Deck – 9 words

Centerpiece copy: 87 words