



Country Living
**PICNICS
AND
PORCH SUPPERS**

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Baked Eggs with Asparagus

Fresh spring asparagus turns an ordinary egg into an elegant brunch. For those watching their waistlines, we've replaced the heavy cream usually called for with skim milk. To keep it warm for picnics, tightly wrap the dish with heavy-duty aluminum foil and nestle it in a towel-lined basket.

MAKES 6 SERVINGS

12 thin stalks (½ pound) asparagus
1 green onion, sliced crosswise
1 teaspoon butter
2 cups skim milk
3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon cracked black pepper
12 large eggs
Paprika
Fresh herb sprigs such as basil and oregano

- ◆ Trim off and discard the tough stem ends of the asparagus. In a 3-quart saucepan, heat the asparagus and water to cover to boiling over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium and cook for 1 minute. Drain the asparagus in a colander and set aside.
- ◆ Heat the oven to 325°F. Lightly grease a 12-inch quiche dish or shallow round baking dish.
- ◆ In a 1-quart saucepan, sauté the green onion in the butter over medium heat until lightly browned. Stir in 1¾ cups of the milk and heat to boiling. In a 1-cup measuring cup, stir the flour into the remaining ¼ cup

milk. Stir the flour mixture into the onion-milk mixture and cook, stirring constantly, until boiling and a thickened sauce forms. Remove the sauce from the heat and set aside.

- ◆ Cut the asparagus stalks to 4½-inch-long spears; reserve the trimmings. Slice the reserved trimmings crosswise into ¼-inch pieces and stir into the sauce along with the salt and pepper. Pour the sauce into the greased dish. Arrange the asparagus spears on the sauce, spoke fashion, with the tips toward the outside of the dish and the cut ends toward the center.

- ◆ With a spoon, make a deep hollow in the center of the sauce to hold the excess egg white. Centered between the asparagus spears and about 1 inch in from the edge of the dish, make shallow hollows in the sauce to hold the egg yolks. Crack one egg into each hollow between the asparagus spears so that the yolk rests in the hollow. If necessary, using a spoon, help guide the excess egg white into the hollow in the center of the dish, avoiding touching the yolks.

- ◆ Carefully place the dish in the oven and bake for 20 to 25 minutes, or until the egg whites are completely set. Sprinkle the top with the paprika and garnish with the herbs sprigs.

Vegetable Frittata

When planning on traveling with a frittata, while it is still in the pan, invert it onto a plate, remove the pan, and place the frittata right-side up on a serving dish. Wrap it tightly in aluminum foil to keep it warm until ready to serve, or slice for sandwiches. Feel free to experiment with this dish by substituting your favorite herbs and vegetables, or adding a handful of grated cheese. This recipe makes individual servings, so you can custom-make each one.

MAKES 1 SERVING

- 3 large egg whites
- 1 large egg
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh chives
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 spray of nonstick vegetable cooking spray
or 1/4 teaspoon vegetable oil
- 1/2 cup cubed red-skinned potatoes
- 1/2 cup broccoli flowerettes
- 1/4 cup coarsely chopped sweet red pepper
- 1/3 cup water
- 1/2 teaspoon vegetable oil
- Fresh chives, for garnish

◆ In a medium-size bowl, beat together the egg whites, egg, chopped chives, salt, and pepper until well combined. Set the egg mixture aside.

◆ Heat a 6-, 7-, or 8-inch oven-proof skillet. Lightly coat the skillet with the nonstick vegetable cooking spray. Add the potatoes and sauté them until they are lightly browned. Add the broccoli, red pepper, and water. Cover and cook until the potatoes are fork-tender—3 to 4 minutes. Remove the lid from the skillet and cook the vegetables until the liquid has evaporated.

◆ Stir the 1/2 teaspoon oil into the vegetables until they are coated.

◆ Add the egg mixture to the skillet. Let the bottom of the egg mixture set, then stir the mixture well. Cover the skillet and continue to cook the eggs until set but still moist on top—about 2 minutes.

◆ Heat the broiler. Uncover the skillet and place the frittata under the broiler, 4 inches from the heat source, and broil until it is browned on top. Garnish with the fresh chives. Serve either hot or at room temperature.

ADDITIONS TO FRITTATA

You can make this frittata as a side dish, main dish or even to be sliced for sandwiches. Try substituting a handful of any of the following for the vegetables in the method:

- Sliced mushrooms
- Sliced zucchini
- Artichoke hearts
- Sliced eggplant
- Fresh peas
- Lima beans



PLANNING THE FUNDAMENTALS OF A PICNIC

When you are planning the perfect picnic, keep these tips in mind. When guests are invited in advance, have an alternative plan indoors in case the weather does not comply. Survey the area you plan to dine at beforehand. If you are laying the picnic out on a blanket, look for a spot with level ground, free of tree roots and holes. Check if there are grills available so you are prepared with charcoal, a grill lighter, and grilling utensils. Depending on the type of picnic you plan to have, check the area for necessities. If you are having a fishing picnic, are there boats to rent or a place to launch

your boat? It is a good idea to keep your picnic near water for quick and easy clean-up.

Have all your essentials picked out and ready to go the night before. Freeze water to take, pack toys for your children and a water bowl for your animals, and write out a list of the food you'll bring.

Once you get to the picnic site, brush away all debris like twigs and stones before spreading out your blanket. Sit near trees so you have some shade, and if children or animals will be joining you, pick a spot where you can see the surrounding area.



Peachy Pancakes

Instead of peach yogurt, any flavor can be substituted in the batter of these pancakes. In place of or in addition to maple syrup, offer fruit syrups such as raspberry, blackberry, or blueberry.

MAKES 2 SERVINGS

1 cup unsifted all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon sugar
1 teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon ground nutmeg
1 large egg
1 8-ounce container lowfat peach yogurt
¼ cup water
1 tablespoon vegetable oil plus more for frying
½ teaspoon vanilla extract
Maple syrup (optional)

◆ In a large bowl, combine the flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, salt, and nutmeg, and set aside.

◆ In a medium-size bowl, with a wire whisk, beat together the egg, yogurt, water, 1 tablespoon of the oil, and the vanilla until the mixture is blended. Add the yogurt mixture to the flour mixture, gently stirring just until the dry ingredients are moistened.

◆ Heat the oven to 200°F. Lightly oil a griddle or 6-inch skillet and place over medium heat. Spread ¼ cup of batter onto the griddle to make a 4-inch pancake. Cook until bubbles form and begin to break on the top surface. Turn the pancake over and cook until the bottom is golden brown. Remove the pancake and keep warm on an ovenproof platter in the oven.

◆ Repeat with the remaining batter, adding more oil to the griddle as necessary. Serve the pancakes warm, with the maple syrup, if desired.

◆ A WEEKEND BRUNCH FOR A CROWD ◆

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Summer Fruit & Dip

Homemade crème fraîche forms a dip for cherries, strawberries, and sugared currants. If you can find them, add some rosy-yellow Queen Anne cherries to the platter. On picnics, store the dip in the cooler until serving.

MAKES 8 SERVINGS

- 2 cups (1 pint) heavy cream (not ultra-pasteurized)
- 3 tablespoons buttermilk
- 4 cups (2 pints) strawberries
- 2 cups fresh sweet cherries
- 1 quart red currants or 1 pound small seedless red grapes, rinsed and dried, stems intact
- 1 envelope unflavored gelatin
- ½ cup water
- 2 tablespoons very cold water
- 1 teaspoon fruit-flavored liqueur
- ½ cup sugar
- Currant or grape leaves (optional)

◆ One day before serving, combine the heavy cream and buttermilk in a 1-quart bowl. Cover loosely and let stand at

room temperature for 12 to 24 hours, or until the mixture thickens and tastes slightly tangy. Cover and refrigerate until serving time. The mixture will keep, covered and refrigerated, for 1 to 2 weeks.

◆ Rinse the fruit and cut into small clusters, if necessary. In a small saucepan, soften the gelatin in the ½ cup water. Heat over low heat, stirring constantly, until the gelatin dissolves. Pour the gelatin mixture into a shallow bowl and stir in the 2 tablespoons cold water and the liqueur. Place the sugar in a plastic bag and dip clusters of the fruit first into the gelatin mixture and then into the sugar, shaking gently to coat. Set aside on waxed paper until the sugar coating dries—about 10 to 15 minutes. To serve, arrange the fruit on serving platters or in bowls and garnish with the leaves, if desired. Spoon the crème fraîche into a serving bowl and serve alongside the fruit.

Mixed-Fruit Granola

This healthful blend of oats, nuts, and dried fruits is a hearty breakfast. Set it out on the table with a pitcher of cold milk and an assortment of mixed fresh berries. Fill single-serving pouches with dry granola for an energizing snack.

MAKES 12 SERVINGS

- 2 cups quick rolled oats
- ¾ cup wheat germ
- ½ cup sliced natural almonds
- ½ cup honey

- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon water
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ⅔ cup chopped pitted dates
- ½ cup golden raisins
- ½ cup dried apricots
- ⅓ cup dried cranberries
- ¼ cup hulled sunflower seeds

◆ Heat the oven to 350°F. In a large bowl, combine the oats, wheat germ, almonds, honey, oil, water, cinnamon, and salt. Spread the mixture onto 2 baking sheets and bake for 15 minutes, stirring several times, until the mixture is a dark golden brown. Pack the mixture into a 9-inch-square baking pan and cool to room temperature.

◆ Break the oat mixture into pea-size chunks over a large bowl. Stir in the dates, raisins, apricots, cranberries, and sunflower seeds. Store in an airtight container.

Breakfast-in-Disguise Oatmeal Cookies

These wholesome cookies can accompany a brunch spread, be eaten on the run, or be packed up to munch on during morning hikes through the countryside. Dried fruits such as raisins, cherries, dates, or apricots can be mixed into the batter.

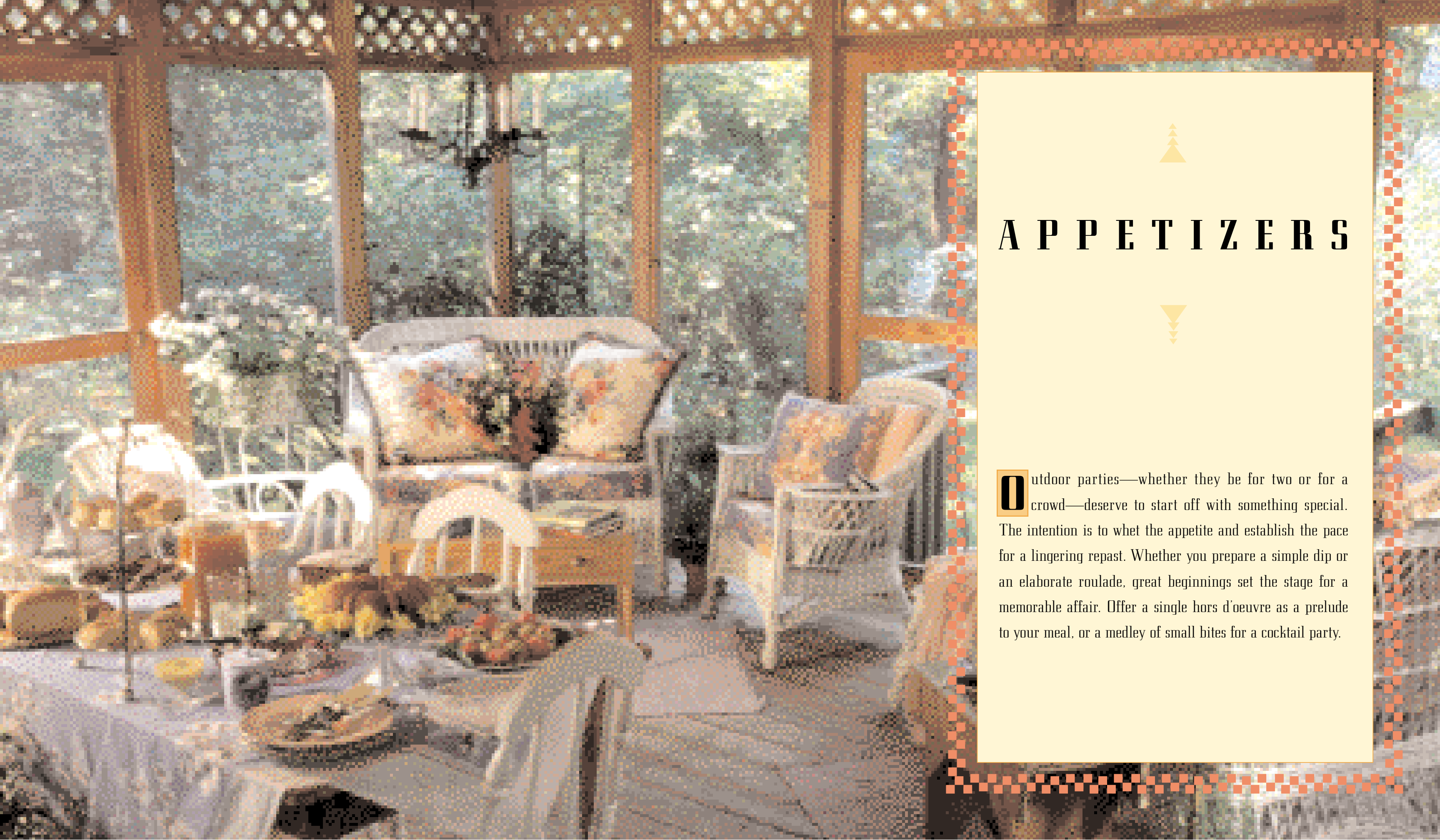
MAKES TWENTY-EIGHT 1½-INCH COOKIES

- 1 cup unsifted all-purpose flour
- 1 cup quick rolled oats
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped toasted walnuts
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ¼ teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¾ cup firmly packed light-brown sugar
- 2 large egg whites
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 tablespoons prune lekvar (prune puree) or apple butter
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

◆ Heat the oven to 375°F. Lightly grease a large baking sheet. In a medium-size bowl, combine the flour, oats, walnuts, cinnamon, baking soda, baking powder, and salt.

◆ In a large bowl, with an electric mixer on medium speed, beat the brown sugar, egg whites, oil, lekvar, and vanilla until well blended. Reduce the mixer speed to low and beat in the flour mixture just until it is combined.

◆ Drop tablespoonfuls of dough, about 1 inch apart, onto the greased baking sheet. Bake the cookies for 8 minutes, or until set but not browned. Cool the cookies on wire racks until slightly warm. While still warm, store in an airtight container to keep them moist.



APPETIZERS



Outdoor parties—whether they be for two or for a crowd—deserve to start off with something special. The intention is to whet the appetite and establish the pace for a lingering repast. Whether you prepare a simple dip or an elaborate roulade, great beginnings set the stage for a memorable affair. Offer a single hors d'oeuvre as a prelude to your meal, or a medley of small bites for a cocktail party.