

DRAFT

Turkey Herder's Pie – Serves 6+



Why should shepherds get all the attention? Ever try to herd turkeys? It's not any easier than herding sheep. So, if you've had a hard day herding turkeys of one kind or another, this is a comforting and really good way to improve your evening. The pie starts with lean ground turkey, adds some smoky bacon and nutritious, tasty vegetables, and is topped with creamy, cheesy mashed potatoes. A 30-minute stint for the pie in the oven gives you plenty of time to rest, relax, or shower away your turkey herding trials.

3-4 large potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks

1-2 teaspoons of canola oil

16 ounces of lean ground turkey (93 percent lean)

3 tablespoons of bacon crumbles, divided

1 small onion, chopped

1 stalk of celery, chopped

1 teaspoon of garlic powder

½ teaspoon of dried oregano

½ teaspoon of dried thyme

½ teaspoon of pepper, divided

1 teaspoon of salt, divided

½ teaspoon of ground sage

2 tablespoons of Worcestershire sauce

1 16-ounce package of frozen mixed vegetables or peas and carrots

1 8-ounce package of fat-free cream cheese, softened and cut into 1-inch chunks

1¼ cups of low fat milk, divided

½ cup of low-fat sour cream

2 eggs, beaten

1 tablespoon of dried parsley flakes

1 tablespoon of minced dried chives

1 cup of cheddar cheese, divided



Add the potatoes to a medium saucepan and cover them with about 2 inches of water. Bring them to a boil, stir them, reduce the heat to a simmer, partially cover them, and let them cook for 15-20 minutes until they're tender.

While the potatoes are cooking, heat a large non-stick skillet over medium high heat and add the oil. When the pan and oil are hot, add the turkey and cook it for 5-10 minutes or so, breaking it up to brown it a little. Add 2 tablespoons of bacon crumbles, the onion, celery, garlic powder, oregano, thyme, $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of pepper, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of salt, the ground sage, and the Worcestershire sauce and cook the mixture for 5 minutes more. Add the package of mixed frozen vegetables and stir the mixture to incorporate them. Turn down the heat to a simmer, cover the skillet, and cook the mixture for five minutes. Add the cream cheese and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the milk and stir to incorporate the milk and cream cheese. Set the mixture aside.

Coat a large casserole (3+ quarts or 9 x 13-inches) with non-stick cooking spray and preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Drain the potatoes. Mash them and add the remaining $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of milk, the light sour cream, eggs, dried parsley, dried chives, $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of pepper, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of salt, and 1 tablespoon of bacon crumbles. Stir in $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the cheese. Spread the turkey mixture on the bottom of the prepared casserole dish and top it with the potato mixture, smoothing out the potatoes to cover the turkey mixture. Bake the casserole for 30 minutes. Sprinkle the remaining cheese over the top of the potatoes and bake for an additional 5 minutes or until the cheese is bubbly. Let the turkey herder's pie cool for 5-10 minutes before serving it.



DRAFT

Chocolate-Hazelnut Stars – Serves 6



These stars look quite impressive given how quick and easy they are to make. The tasty stars—golden brown and oozing with chocolate hazelnut spread—are best served warm, the day that you make them, all puffy and flaky. Nonetheless, if you have any leftovers, you can reheat them the next day in a 350-degree oven for a few minutes to crisp them up again. The stars are easy enough to pick up and eat with your fingers, but you can also serve them on fancy plates drizzled with a little raspberry sauce for a nicer presentation (and to keep your fingers clean). If you really want to dress up the stars, after drizzling them with the raspberry sauce, scatter a few fresh raspberries and toasted hazelnuts around them.

1 sheet of puff pastry, thawed

½ cup of chocolate hazelnut spread (such as Nutella, but see the note at the end of the recipe)

¼ cup of raw (or turbinado) sugar

1-2 teaspoons of flour

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees and coat a baking sheet with nonstick cooking spray. Place a large piece of parchment or waxed paper on the counter and sprinkle it with a little of the flour and about half of the sugar. Place the pastry on top of the flour and sugar and sprinkle the top of the pastry with a little more flour. Roll out the pastry until it is about 2 inches longer on each side (the sugar will be pressed into the dough). Using a star-shaped cutter, cut out 12 stars. Divide the chocolate hazelnut spread among 6 of the stars, placing little blobs of the spread in the center part of the stars. Moisten the edges of each “blobbed” star with a little water and press the “non-blobbed” stars on top, with the sugared side facing up. Press the edges of the stars together to seal them. Place the stars on the baking sheet, leaving a couple of inches of space between them. Moisten the tops of the stars with a little water and sprinkle on the remaining raw sugar. Bake the stars for about 15 minutes or until puffed and golden. Let the stars cool at least 10 minutes before serving them, alone or drizzled with a little raspberry sauce.



Quick Raspberry Sauce

½ cup of raspberry preserves

½ teaspoon of grated orange zest

2 tablespoons of water

In a measuring cup mix the preserves, orange zest, and water. Microwave the mixture for 20-30 seconds and stir it until it's smooth. If the preserves were very cold to start, you may need to microwave the mixture another 10 seconds or so and stir it again.

Note: Don't have any chocolate-hazelnut spread? It's okay. Instead, combine ½ cup of chocolate chips with 1 teaspoon of butter and 1 teaspoon of hazelnut flavoring (or vanilla extract extract, if you can't find the hazelnut) in a glass measuring cup. Microwave the chips for 30 seconds, stir them, and microwave them again in 15-second increments, stirring them each time, until they are melted and smooth (you may not need to heat them more than one more time). Use the chocolate mixture instead of the chocolate-hazelnut spread in the recipe.





December 5

There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Luke 21: 25-26

What a far cry from the peaceful hopes we commonly anticipate as we move toward Christmas. As Luke reflects on the times he sees ahead, he trembles, and so might we. Yes, communications were certainly different then, in Luke's time, and so were gaps in knowledge of the natural world. Yet, even with our contemporary understanding of science, are there not occasions when we shudder at the impact of the evening news and other events that mark our days?

"But wait! There is more," the commercials remind us again and again. As Luke looks ahead, so may we, toward God's gift of grace.





In the Kitchen, December 5

Tomato-Basil Salad

Polenta Casserole

Spinach

Lemon-Rosemary Bars with Sherbet

Tonight's dinner is rich but meatless. Let's start with Tomato-Basil Salad. Then, keeping with an Italian theme, follow with Polenta Casserole. This is a dish your children (or spouse, significant friend, or just about anyone else) can do. It requires only layering and baking—not hard—and it's full of lovely, warm, gooey melted cheese. Frozen spinach zapped in the microwave adds a nice green touch to the plates. Then, perhaps try a simple dessert? The Lemon-Rosemary Bars are easy to make and can bake along side the Polenta Casserole. The bars don't look fancy, but they are different and will disappear quickly. Serve them with some fruity sherbet or low fat frozen yogurt for a refreshing end to the meal.





Tomato-Basil Salad – Serves 8

This recipe is a splurge in winter because it requires fresh tomatoes, basil, and pricey mozzarella. Nonetheless, the salad is tasty and colorful and goes a long way. If you'd like to make the tomato mixture ahead so the flavors can develop, please do so, and then refrigerate it. You can top the salad greens with the tomato mixture later when you're almost ready to serve dinner.

1 pint of cherry or grape tomatoes, halved

1 pint of yellow cherry tomatoes, halved

½ red onion, chopped

8 ounces of fresh mozzarella "pearls" (or chopped fresh mozzarella)

½ cup of chopped fresh basil, plus extra to garnish

¼ teaspoon of salt

¼ teaspoon of pepper

2-3 tablespoons of olive oil

¼ cup of red wine vinegar

4 cups of baby salad greens

In a large bowl, combine the tomatoes, onion, mozzarella, basil, salt, pepper, oil, and vinegar and stir well to coat everything with the vinegar and oil. Divide the salad greens among the plates and top each with a bit of the tomato-mozzarella mixture and a sprig or couple of leaves of fresh basil.





Polenta Casserole – Serves 6

This lasagna-like casserole looks and tastes fancy, but it isn't. The casserole can be inexpensive to put together, particularly if you opt for fat-free cottage cheese and make your own polenta, which is quite easy. Whether you decide to make your own polenta or not, the casserole is easy to assemble and bakes in about 40 minutes—quicker than most lasagnas. The quick cooking time is good, because, with the smells coming from your oven, you'll be eager to taste the beautiful casserole with its combination of acidic marinara sauce, tangy and salty cheeses, and creamy polenta.

*2 cups of fat-free ricotta cheese**

½ cup of grated Parmesan cheese (from the round green canister is fine)

¼ cup of chopped parsley (or 2 tablespoons of dried parsley)

¼ teaspoon of pepper

½ teaspoon of basil

1 26-ounce jar of marinara sauce

2 16-ounce tubes of polenta cut into 12 rounds each (or make your own rounds or squares)

2 cups of shredded, part-skim mozzarella, divided

½ cup of shredded Parmesan cheese

¼ cup of chopped parsley (optional)

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees and coat a large casserole dish or 9 x 13- inch pan with nonstick spray. In a large bowl, mix the ricotta, ½ cup of grated Parmesan cheese, parsley, pepper, and basil until well combined. Spread ½ of the jar of sauce on the bottom of the baking dish. Top the sauce with 12 of the polenta rounds. Divide the ricotta mixture evenly on top of the polenta, making little mounds on each round. Using half of the mozzarella, sprinkle each mound with some of the cheese. Top each mound with one of the remaining 12 polenta rounds. Spoon the rest of the marinara sauce over



the polenta and sprinkle on the remaining mozzarella. Coat one side of a piece of foil with nonstick spray and cover the baking dish, sprayed side down. Bake the polenta for about 30 minutes or until heated through and bubbly. Uncover the dish and sprinkle with the ½ cup of Parmesan cheese. Return the dish to the oven for 5-10 minutes or until the cheese is a little crusty. Let the casserole stand for 10-15 minutes and sprinkle with parsley, if you like, before serving.

**Or use fat-free cottage cheese, if you prefer.*

Polenta

This is a very basic polenta that firms up so that you can cut it and use it in other dishes. If you want to make polenta rounds, pour the hot polenta into empty, clean cans (15-16 ounces or so) that you've coated on the inside with non-stick cooking spray. When the polenta has firmed up, turn the cans upside down and use a can opener to remove the bottoms of the cans. Then push the polenta out (you may need to run a knife around the edges first) and use it as you'd like. Think beyond the casserole above. For example, you also can cut the polenta into squares and brown the squares in a little oil in a skillet, or you can cut the polenta into whatever shapes you like, place them on a baking sheet coated with non-stick spray, top them with something good—a bit of pesto and a tomato slice, for example—and bake them (350-400 degrees, depending on the topping) until browned and/or hot. Use your imagination. Maybe top the polenta slices with some sliced pears, goat cheese crumbles, and walnut pieces? Or maybe use some apple slices and sharp cheddar?

1 cup of yellow cornmeal (preferably course- or medium-ground)

1 cup of water

2¾ cups of boiling water

½ teaspoon of salt

RAFT

Line an 8 or 9-inch square pan with aluminum foil and coat it with non-stick spray. Mix the cornmeal and water in a large saucepan. Whisk in the boiling water and salt. Cook the mixture over medium heat about five minutes, whisking constantly, until the mixture boils and thickens. Reduce the heat to low and cook the polenta another 5 minutes, stirring it occasionally. Remove the polenta from the heat and spread it in the pan. Cover the pan and let the polenta cool to room temperature. Refrigerate it until it's firm and then cut it into squares or rounds (or use the trick of pouring the polenta into clean cans, letting it firm up, and then pushing it out of the cans and slicing it into rounds).



DRAFT Lemon Rosemary Bars – Makes 16+

These bars are quick to mix up and elegantly simple. The bars are essentially a type of shortbread—crunchy and infused with bright-tart lemon and piney-tasting rosemary. If you possibly can, use fresh rosemary and snip it into small pieces with a pair of kitchen scissors. The dark-green flecks will look nice in the bars and provide better flavor than the dried rosemary. The bars are just right with a cup of coffee or tea, and they also make a nice accompaniment to sherbet or low-fat yogurt or ice cream.

½ cup of Smart or Earth Balance (or butter)

½ cup of confectioners' sugar

1 tablespoon of chopped fresh rosemary (or 2 teaspoons of dried rosemary)

1¼ cups of flour

Grated zest of a lemon

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees and coat a 9-inch-square baking pan with nonstick cooking spray or line the 9-inch pan with aluminum foil and coat the foil with nonstick cooking spray. Place the Smart Balance in a microwave-safe mixing bowl and melt it in the microwave for 15-30 seconds or according to your microwave directions. Add the confectioners' sugar, rosemary, flour, and lemon zest and mix everything well. Spread the dough evenly in the prepared pan. Score the dough with a sharp knife and bake it for about 20 minutes. Let the bars cool for 5 minutes, re-cut them, and let them cool in the pan before removing them. If you'd like, dust the bars lightly with powdered sugar before serving them.





DRAFT

December 6

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers.

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place?

Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully. They will receive the blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of their salvation.

Psalm 24: 1-6

Through the days of Advent preparation, the gift of God's grace to our world and to us is one freely given. We, too, have a gift for God. The Psalmist draws a picture of the preparation: the gift of clean hands and of pure hearts, of honesty and truth. When we buy the five-pound bag of flour or the five-pound bag of sugar, do we not expect full measure? When the recipe calls for a tablespoon of seasoning, do we not find that a teaspoon leaves something to be desired? Honesty before God is our gift to him in these Advent days.





In the Kitchen, December 6

Tomato-Cucumber Salad

Pomegranate Chicken

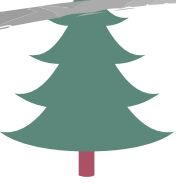
Bulgur

Baked Zucchini

Strawberry-Avocado Torte

Tonight let's forego a standby dinner of takeout or frozen pizza and trade it for something much better. To start, try a simple tomato and cucumber salad. You will be surprised at how good a few simple ingredients mixed together can be. Then follow with Pomegranate Chicken. The sweet-tangy sauce glistening on the economical but tender chicken thighs will awaken taste buds rendered dormant by the standby pizza dinner. With onions, dates, and walnuts, the chicken dish needs only a sprinkling of fresh, jewel-like pomegranate seeds atop to dress it up. To accompany the chicken, some nutritious, quick to fix bulgur and roasted zucchini would go well. The zucchini can bake in the same oven as the shell for the Strawberry-Avocado Torte. You don't have to tell your family what's in the torte until after they've had some; it may sound weird, but the torte is delightfully decadent without the bad fats! Less guilt! Isn't that a wonderful way to move through Advent?





Tomato-Cucumber Salad – Serves 4-6

This salad includes the red and green colors of the season and gets a lovely, fresh taste from the lemony dressing and mint. The salad is great, “as is” or served atop lettuce or similar mild greens.

1 pint of cherry or grape tomatoes, halved, or about 4 plum tomatoes chopped

1 medium cucumber, peeled and cut into smallish chunks

2 tablespoons of lemon juice

1 tablespoon of olive oil

1/2 a small red onion, chopped

¼ teaspoon of lemon pepper seasoning

1-2 tablespoons of chopped fresh mint

2 cups of lettuce (or other salad greens)

Mix all the ingredients except the greens together and refrigerate the mixture for at least an hour to blend all the flavors. Divide the lettuce among the plates and top with the tomato-cucumber mixture.





Pomegranate Chicken – Serves 4

Pomegranate chicken is a little unusual, but it's appropriate for the season, coming from the East. The tangy pomegranate molasses and sweet dates add incredible taste to the dish, which is quick and easy to make. You certainly can use boneless, skinless chicken breasts, if you prefer. Nonetheless, the thighs usually are more tender and often less expensive. I think the depth of flavor from the thighs also better complements the other ingredients in the dish. You often can find pomegranate molasses in grocery or international markets, but, if you can't, don't let that deter you. I've provided a simple recipe for the pomegranate molasses below. And if you have any leftover (which you should), consider drizzling the pomegranate molasses over some low fat vanilla frozen yogurt or ice cream. The pomegranate molasses also is great for breakfast, drizzled on waffles, French toast, pancakes, you get the idea...

16-24 ounces of boneless, skinless chicken thighs, trimmed of excess fat

1 large onion, sliced

1-2 teaspoons of olive oil

½ teaspoon of lemon pepper seasoning

¼ cup of broken or chopped walnuts

½ cup of reduced sodium chicken broth

¼ cup of pomegranate molasses

1 tablespoon of dried parsley flakes

8 whole dried dates, cut in half

2 cups of cooked bulgur (see below)

2 tablespoons of fresh, chopped parsley (optional)

¼ cup of pomegranate arils (optional)



Heat a large non-stick skillet over medium high heat. Add the oil and the onion. Sauté the onion for 5-10 minutes to soften and brown it. Add the chicken to the pan and sprinkle it