

Thanksgiving is the foodiest holiday of the year. Did you invite the whole famdamily and half the neighborhood to feast at your house this year? Moreover, are you cursing that moment of weakness? Blame it on the euphoria of another Patriots' victory or the extra glass of wine but you invited everyone, yes EVERYONE, for Thanksgiving. In the cold light of a rainy day, it now seems a bit daunting. Don't despair it's all in the planning plus a few tricks and a hack or two.

Here goes:

Make your lists early, like now. Check them twice. You need two lists. The first is the all-important shopping list of what to buy, when and where. The second is the just as important To Do list. Follow both as if your life depended on it. Your life doesn't but your sanity might.

Start early, now would be good. You have your lists, so, anything that can be done in advance; do it. I like to begin my Thanksgiving feast with Roasted Butternut Squash Soup. If you do too, make it this weekend and freeze it. Same goes for the lovely pie dough we all like so much. Make and roll out the pastry and freeze it in the pie plate or flat on a cookie sheet.

If someone offers to bring a dish, say yes. But remember, as chief cook and bottle washer, you call the shots. Be polite but firm. If you have enough sweet potato casserole to mortar a large chimney but need another pie, say so. Stay strong. If no one offers, the bakery is there for a reason.

In addition, as dinner comes down to the wire, a handful of helpful Hannahs will flock to your kitchen. Have a list of simple tasks, things like opening wine, pouring water and tossing salad, and be ready to delegate. It will help get dinner on the table faster and the Hannahs out of your hair.

It's the chopping-ist time of the year. What with onions and celery for stuffing, squash for roasting and potatoes for mashing, it seems endless. Begin early and store chopped veggies in the refrigerator. If a recipes calls for a boatload of finely chopped or diced veggies, your food processor can be your best friend. Cut the vegetables in chunks, throw them in the food processor and pulse to chop. Don't overdo it, you want finely chopped not purée.

Speaking of recipes, don't clutter the counters with cookbooks, laptops and tablets. Photocopy your favorite recipes or print from the web. Then, use painter's tape to stick them onto the kitchen cabinets. It's a win-win; more counter space and your recipes are at eye level.

Speaking of clutter, unless you have an extra refrigerator in the garage, chances are good that you'll run out of cold storage. If the weather cooperates, store goodies on the screened porch. But watch out! If temperatures plummet into the teens overnight, well, iceberg lettuce anyone? To keep food from freezing, store it in a cooler. If it's really cold, wrap the cooler in an old blanket or quilt. On Thanksgiving Day, use those same coolers for ice and drinks.

If you don't have an instant-read food thermometer, now is the time to buy one. For less than \$10, you can finally, once and for all, end the "is it done yet?" debate. Just stick the thermometer in the thickest part of the bird and get a reading of 165 degrees before pulling it out of the oven.

And to keep everything warm? As long as you don't carve it immediately (and please don't, it should rest for thirty minutes), that big old turkey will stay warm for at least an hour. Loosely cover with foil and set it out of the dog's reach. Use the time to roast vegetables, mash potatoes and make the gravy. By the way, a thermos is perfect for keeping the gravy nice and hot.

Here's to a happy and sane Thanksgiving! Bon appétit!




Butternut Squash Crostini with Goat Cheese & Balsamic Reduction

You can't celebrate Thanksgiving without at least a little butternut squash and/or pumpkin. Enjoy!

Serves 12

About 2 pounds butternut squash, peeled, seeded and chopped

Olive oil

Balsamic vinegar

Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

1 shallot, chopped

1 teaspoon fresh chopped sage

1/2 tablespoon fresh thyme

1 tablespoon cognac

1 baguette, sliced on the diagonal about 1/2-inch-thick and toasted

10-12 ounces goat cheese

Garnish: Balsamic Reduction (recipe follows), toasted hazelnuts or pumpkin seeds and chopped chives

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.

Divide the squash onto 2 rimmed baking sheets, drizzle with enough equal parts olive oil and vinegar to lightly coat, sprinkle with salt and pepper and toss to combine. Spread the squash in a single layer. Roast at 375 degrees for 20 minutes.

Add the shallot, toss to combine and roast 15-20 minutes more or until the vegetables are tender.

Combine the squash on 1 pan, sprinkle with sage and thyme, drizzle with cognac and toss to combine.

The squash can be prepared in advance, cooled, covered and stored in the refrigerator. Bring to room temperature before serving.



To assemble and serve: spread a layer of goat cheese on the toasted baguette slices and top with butternut squash. If you like, you can warm the crostini in a 350-degree oven for 5-10 minutes. Drizzle sparingly with Balsamic Reduction and sprinkle with hazelnuts and chives.



*Another recipe from Susan Nye:
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Balsamic Reduction

Makes about 3/4 cup

1 cup balsamic vinegar
2 tablespoons minced shallot
1 small clove garlic, minced
1 bay leaf
1 teaspoon finely chopped sage
1/2 teaspoon thyme leaves
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
1 tablespoon or to taste honey
1/4 cup or to taste extra virgin olive oil
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Put the vinegar in small, heavy saucepan and bring to a boil the over medium heat. Reduce the heat to low and simmer until reduced by half. Remove from the heat and stir in the shallot, garlic and herbs. Cool to room temperature.

Remove the bay leaf and, using a rubber spatula to press on the remaining solids, strain the vinegar through a sieve into a bowl. Season with salt and pepper and whisk in the mustard and honey. Continue whisking and slowly add the olive oil until thick and well combined. Serve at room temperature.

Cover and store extra Balsamic Reduction in the refrigerator.

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Susan Nye – Around the Table at www.susannye.wordpress.com

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Thanksgiving Tips, Tricks & Hacks & Butternut Squash Crostini

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