

the *last minute*

easy entertaining with elle

cook
book

appetizers + cocktails

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hey, there.

cooler temperatures and bare trees are tell-tell signs winter is here. it also happens to be my favorite time of the year for the obvious reason: the extra hour that comes with daylight savings.

no, seriously. it's something special about the succession of holidays in fall-winter. it's like they're almost magical in a peculiar kind of way, bringing about the urgency to have people over, for no other reason than to share a bite or twelve and enjoy each other's company.

so, should you find yourself hosting a casual get-together or well orchestrated affair, use the recipes and easy solutions on the following pages as a launching pad and you'll look like a pro.

...to good food and good times



p.s. we're working on new content. so, if you're social, look down, click and join me.

p.p.s. we're really working on new content. for real.



beast puppies

prep time

25 min

cook time

7 min

yields

18-21

things you need

1 1/4 cup

corn flour

1 cup

corn meal

1 1/2 tsp

sea salt

1 tbsp

baking powder

1 large

egg

1 1/4 cup

milk

2 1/2 tbsp

honey

1 cup

wild green onions, snipped

1/2 lb

crawfish, cooked

1/2 lb

shrimp, cooked

12 cloves

roasted garlic

1 1/4 cup

corn flour

3 cup

grapeseed oil

here's how

- 1 roughly chop shrimp and crawfish.
- 2 place dry ingredients in a large bowl and whisk together. in a separate bowl, mix egg, milk and honey, ensuring everything is well incorporated. combine liquid and dry ingredients. add crawfish, shrimp, green onions and roasted garlic.
- 3 set a large, heavy pot over medium-high heat, reaching 350 degrees Fahrenheit. using a #100 ice cream scoop, gather the batter and gently release into hot oil. cook until lightly golden, approximately 1 minute, turning to cook the other side.
- 4 remove with a kitchen spider or large slotted spoon. transfer to a paper towel lined tray to absorb any excess oil.

back story

I grew up eating these, only we didn't call them beast puppies. when my grandmother made them, she simply referred to them as puppies with seafood. I decided to share this recipe because [viewers](#) wanted tie-ins to the Oscars® and that year, *beast of the southern wild* was one of the movies nominated.

easy solution

this recipe is rather versatile. if there's someone in the bunch who doesn't eat shellfish, use a white fish instead.

mushroom munchies

prep time

10 min

cook time

7 min

yields

18-21

things you need

1 cup

all-purpose flour

1 tsp

baking powder

1 tsp

sea salt

1/2 cup

pecorino romano, grated

1/4 cup

fontina, grated

1 small

shallot, minced

1 tbsp

parsley, finely chopped

1 tbsp

thyme, finely chopped

1 large

egg

1 cup

cremini mushrooms, diced

1 cup

chanterelle mushrooms, diced

3 oz

water

3 cup

grapeseed oil

here's how

- 1 place dry ingredients and herbs in a mixing bowl and stir.
- 2 add mushrooms and cheese, creating a well.
- 3 meanwhile, in a separate bowl, whisk eggs and water, and pour into well, stirring to fully incorporate the batter.
- 4 pour oil in a pot and set over medium-high heat. once oil has reached 350 degrees Fahrenheit, lower scoops of mushroom batter, without overcrowding the oil.
- 5 mushroom munchies should cook approximately 1 to 2 minutes,
- 6 using tongs, carefully remove mushroom munchies and transfer to a paper towel lined pan to absorb any excess oil.

easy solutions

use a #100 ice cream scoop. it's petite and yields bite-size appetizers. if looking to feed a crowd without breaking the bank, double the cremini and skip the chanterelle mushrooms.

these are best eaten immediately and pair so well with beer or root beer.

at-home pizza rolls

prep time

5 min

cook time

7 min

yields

10

things you need

20 large

spring roll pastry wrappers

20 slices

pepperoni

10 tbsp

mozzarella cheese, shredded

10 tbsp

marinara sauce

3 cup

grapeseed oil

food glue

here's how

- 1 stack 2 spring roll wrappers. brush all four sides with food glue.
- 2 place 1 tablespoon of cheese in the center. layer 1 tablespoon of marinara sauce and 2 pepperoni slices.
- 3 fold each vertical side to the center, making sure they do not overlap. fold the bottom pastry wrapper end to the center. brush the top with food glue. roll the wrapper closed.
- 4 set pizza roll aside, seam side down. repeat steps 1 through 5 for remaining pizza rolls.
- 5 using a heavy, wide pot, heat 1 inch grapeseed oil to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. gently place 3 to 4 pizza rolls in oil and cook for 3 minutes or until brown.
- 6 using a kitchen spider or tongs, remove pizza rolls and transfer to a paper towel lined pan to absorb any excess oil.
- 7 [watch](#) on-air presentation.

easy solutions

mother often made these when we were growing up. of course, my dad took his loaded with everything, but to satisfy my sisters, brother and me, she did a variety: beef, sausage, pepperoni, and veggies.

to make food glue, add 3 tablespoons of flour and 1/2 cup of water to a small bowl and stir until it becomes a paste.

shrimp creole rice balls

prep time

10 min

cook time

7 min

yields

18-21

things you need

1/2 cup

Arborio rice

1/2 cup

shrimp stock

1 tbsp

tomato paste

to taste

sea salt

7 oz

shrimp, diced

1/4 cup

bell pepper, diced

1/4 cup

shallots, finely chopped

2 large

eggs

4 tbsp

grapeseed oil

2 tbsp

oat flour

1 cup

panko breadcrumbs, finely ground

2 tsp

Cajun spice

here's how

- 1 add the first 5 ingredients to a medium pot and set over medium-high heat. with the lid partially off, cook 15 to 20 minutes or until rice is tender. transfer rice to an airtight container and refrigerate.
- 2 meanwhile, set a skillet over medium-high heat and add oil. once it begins to shimmer, add bell pepper, shrimp and spices. stir often and cook until shrimp are pink. transfer shrimp and bell pepper to a dish and refrigerate, reserving the flavored oil.
- 3 mix rice, bell pepper, shrimp, and diced shallot.
- 4 preheat oven to 375 degrees Fahrenheit.
- 5 using 2 dredging dishes, place oat flour and eggs in one, stirring well. In the other, add panko breadcrumbs. working with wet hands, form rice mixture into equal size balls,
- 6 roll each rice ball in the flour mixture, then panko breadcrumbs. next, transfer battered rice balls to a parchment lined pan and mist all sides with oil.
- 7 bake rice balls 15 minutes. remove from oven and turn each ball over. return pan to the oven and bake rice balls an additional 15 to 20 minutes or until desired browning has occurred.
- 8 transfer rice balls to a serving platter and drizzle with reserved flavored oil.

easy solutions

for best results, make sure the rice is extremely cold.

it wouldn't be such a bad idea to double the recipe, making half without seafood, especially when having family and friends over. you never know who may not be eating shellfish at the time.

roasted garden dip

prep time

5 min

cook time

20 min

yields

10

things you need

2 tbsp

roasted garlic paste

2 tbsp

grapeseed oil

4 medium

carrots

pinch

sea salt

1 large

purple onion, quartered

pinch

fresh white pepper

12 oz

chèvre

4 oz

crème fraîche

1/4 cup

parsley, chopped

here's how

- 1 preheat oven to broiler setting.
- 2 line baking pan with parchment paper. arrange onion and carrots on baking pan and lightly drizzle with grapeseed oil.
- 3 cook vegetables 15 to 20 minutes.
- 4 remove and set aside. once cool, dice vegetables.
- 5 place chèvre and crème fraîche in a bowl and stir. add heavy cream, vegetables, garlic paste, and herbs. season with sea salt and pepper.

easy solution

when I initially developed this dip recipe umpteen years ago, I used leftover ingredients from chicken pot pie. since then, I've made it many, many times. if I have a red bell pepper on hand, I roast and add it as well. it really intensifies the flavor.

roasted vegetable relish

prep time

5 min

cook time

20 min

serves

6-8

things you need

4 large
bell peppers

2 cup
black olives

2 large
garlic bulbs

1 medium
shallot

1/4 cup
parsley

2 tbsp
grapeseed oil

1/3 cup
balsamic vinegar

pinch
sea salt

here's how

- 1 preheat oven to 375 degrees Fahrenheit.
- 2 line baking pan with parchment paper. arrange peppers, garlic, shallot and olives on baking pan and lightly drizzle with grapeseed oil.
- 3 cook vegetables 15 to 20 minutes.
- 4 transfer roasted vegetables, balsamic vinegar, and parsley to a food processor. pulsate until desired consistency is reached.
- 5 taste and sprinkle in sea salt as needed.
- 6 transfer to a bowl.
- 7 this dip can be enjoyed warm or cold and pairs well with baguette chips (see page 16) .

easy solutions

though I absolutely love this dip, it was actually something my maternal grandmother cooked for us. she and granddad had a way of making each of us feel special, and since I was beginning this love affair with mushrooms, she always made a point to top my bowl with roasted mushrooms.

baguette chips

prep time

5 min

cook time

12 min

serves

6-8

things you need

1 large

baguette loaf

3 tbsp

grapeseed oil

1/8 tsp

sea salt

here's how

- 1 preheat oven to broiler setting.
- 2 line baking pan with parchment paper.
- 3 cut baguette into 1/4 inch slices and sprinkle with sea salt.
- 4 using a pastry brush, brush both sides with oil. arrange bread slices on baking sheet.
- 5 place in the oven to bake. after 7 minutes, turn chips over and bake an additional 3 to 5 minutes.
- 6 store any leftovers in an airtight container.

easy solutions

these chips were initially made with the elite 8 dip, a recipe I developed for the Final 4 Playoffs. truth be told, we enjoy them with the roasted garden dip (page 12) as well as the roasted vegetable dip (page 14).

great pumpkin

prep time

3 min

cook time

n/a

serves

4

things you need

1/2 cup

pumpkin purée

6 oz

sweetened whipped cream

3 1/2 oz

ginger liqueur

ice

4 oz

cardamom bitters

2 oz

spiced rum

to taste

brown sugar syrup

splash

vanilla extract

here's how

- 1 chill ginger liqueur, cardamom bitters, and spiced rum.
- 2 fill cocktail shaker with ice, pumpkin puree, ginger liqueur, cardamom bitters, spiced rum, and vanilla.
- 3 shake vigorously and taste.
- 4 add brown sugar syrup.
- 4 pour equal amounts into glasses, topping with sweetened whipped cream.
- 5 [watch](#) the on-air presentation.

easy solution

if you have pumpkin seeds and time to spare, crush toasted pumpkin seeds and sprinkle on top.

back story

it's no secret I love all things charlie brown. and this cocktail is my homage to him and the rest of the gang. even though I've watched it more times than I can remember, it's a reminder of everything that's right in the world.

dusty road

prep time

3 min

cook time

n/a

serves

4

things you need

16 oz

chocolate liqueur

12 oz

coffee liqueur

2 oz

crème de cacao

4 oz

melted chocolate

4 oz

cocoa

ice

here's how

- 1 dip rims in melted chocolate, followed by cocoa.
- 2 fill cocktail shaker with ice and liqueurs.
- 3 shake vigorously and pour equal amounts into glasses and enjoy.

easy solutions

if you don't have chocolate for melting on hand, chocolate syrup is a suitable substitution.

also, when hosting a party or mixing for a crowd, pre-mix liqueurs and store in an airtight container. refrigerate until ready to serve.

southern gin + tonic

prep time

3 min

cook time

n/a

serves

4

things you need

8 oz

gin

6 oz

fresh pear juice

6 oz

tonic, chilled

1/4 cup

lavender syrup

4 small

dehydrated pear chips

ice

here's how

- 1 with a knife, cut a small slit in each dehydrated pear slice.
- 2 fill cocktail shaker with ice.
- 2 add gin, pear juice and lavender syrup.
- 3 give a few shakes and pour equal amounts into glasses.
- 4 stir in tonic and enjoy.
- 5 add a pear slice to the side of each glass.

back story

back in 2014, a Texas couple called on [us](#) to cater their weekend wedding shindig. he's a gin and tonic guy and she loves all things floral and fruity. and it was my responsibility to take both and come up with a cocktail, one I call *g and t meets p and l*.

apple jack

prep time

3 min

cook time

n/a

serves

4

things you need

16 oz

fresh apple juice

4 oz

whiskey

4 oz

rum

here's how

- 1 fill glasses with ice cubes.
- 2 fill cocktail shaker with apple juice and whiskey.
- 3 shake vigorously and pour equal amounts into glasses and enjoy.
- 4 stir in tonic.

cranberry crisp

prep time

3 min

cook time

n/a

serves

8-10

things you need

32 oz

fresh cranberry juice

14 oz

hard cider

8 oz

rum

20 oz

simple syrup

frozen cranberries

here's how

- 1 place cranberry juice, hard cider, simple syrup and rum in a pitcher.
- 2 stir and add more simple syrup, if needed.
- 3 just before serving, add frozen cranberries.

easy solution

you can also fill ice trays with cranberries, simple syrup, and fresh thyme. not only is it pretty, but flavorful as well.

easy solutions

establish a budget and stick to it.

instead of hosting Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, select one holiday.

hosting can be a lot of fun, but a small gathering can quickly turn into an all out party, going from 8 to 40 guests, easily. to keep the cost at a minimum, host a dessert party. doing so, not only saves money, but time, seeing partygoers will only be on hand for a hour or so.

having an open bar is wonderful, but it can come with a premium price. when throwing a party, think prohibition raid and put your liquor out of sight. take this opportunity to let your creativity shine and mix a signature cocktail. it'll also have your guests talking about the special drink you created exclusively for the occasion.

each recipe can be easily doubled or tripled to satisfy a larger crowd.

if any of this is overwhelming, give us a call.

credits

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about elle

southern to the core

currently living in the texas

culinary contributor for [wreg](#) and [wish-tv](#) (yes, hard at work)

private chef to NBA player

caterer to the elite of the mid-south and dallas

there's probably something else worth mentioning



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