

IN GOOD TASTE

By Vera Stewart | Photos by Amy J. Owen



How many times have you heard the phrase, “don’t judge a book by its cover.” Well, the same can be said for food. Food on a budget can be made to look like a 5-star restaurant presentation with the right culinary skill and eye for creativity.

The spaghetti sauce recipe in this issue, featured from my cookbook *Occasions*, is my sister Bitsy’s recipe.

For the presentation, we used a 5-inch Christmas tree cookie cutter and filled it with vermicelli noodles and sauce. We shaped mozzarella balls and decorated them with food coloring for the ornaments. We added large edible gold sprinkles for the trim. Tiny slices of toast surround the tree as presents, tied with wilted spring onions! Garland is a must and an old school, half-moon chip ‘n’ dip tray was a perfect fit, which doubled as the topper of our festive tree. (Our original recipe has meatballs, which you can omit all together, or place in an additional bowl.)

The star of this meal is our favorite semi-homemade ice cream, from *Occasions*, and served in a stemmed sherbet glass nestled in a Christmas stocking. The stockings can be personalized, and you could place some special truffles or hard candy inside them.

This ice cream recipe reminds me of the early ‘70s when I was a resident of Madison, Ga., and met a great friend who was a true hostess. I would have never dreamed that she used grocery store vanilla ice cream. It has been a favorite of my dinner guests for years.

Our goal for the next cookbook — pre-sales begin in February — is to offer a variety of generational recipes that mom and son, or grandmother and granddaughter, can do together. We have incorporated summer camp favorites, as well as family favorites, and recipes that grow in technique and execution throughout the book.

Make your holiday dinner party showcase all your best efforts by creating a special presentation to impress.



Bitsy's **SPAGHETTI** *Sauce* with Meatballs

Prep Time: 1 hour | **Cook Time:** 4 to 6 hours | **Yield:** approximately 10 to 12 servings; 24 meatballs

INGREDIENTS

Spaghetti Sauce

1 ½ lbs. ground beef (80/20)
1 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
12 oz. sliced Portobello mushrooms
1 ½ cups diced Vidalia onion
½ cup diced bell pepper (red or green)
2 garlic cloves, minced
2 (15 oz.) cans tomato sauce
2 (14.5 oz.) cans diced tomatoes with basil, garlic and oregano
1 (6 oz.) can tomato paste
½ cup water
¼ cup red wine
2 tsp. granulated sugar
¼ cup chopped flat leaf parsley
¼ tsp. dried rosemary
¼ tsp. dried thyme
½ tsp. dried oregano
½ tsp. dried basil

½ tsp. kosher salt
½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
2 bay leaves
1 to 2 (16 oz.) boxes vermicelli noodles,
prepared per package instructions

Meatballs

1 lb. ground beef (80/20)
¾ lb. ground mild Italian sausage
½ cup Italian breadcrumbs
½ cup diced Vidalia onion
¼ cup chopped flat leaf parsley
1 garlic clove, minced
1 tsp. kosher salt
½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
1 Tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
1 large egg, beaten
¼ cup whole milk
2 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil



Roasted BEET SALAD

with Balsamic Vinaigrette

Prep Time: 15 minutes | **Cook Time:** 60 minutes | **Serves:** 6

INGREDIENTS

Salad

- 4 medium beets, trimmed and scrubbed
- 2 Tbsp. olive oil, salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 4 cups mixed greens
- ¼ cup thinly sliced red onion
- ½ cup shredded Gruyère or Swiss cheese
- ¼ cup chopped toasted pecans

Balsamic Vinaigrette

- 3 Tbsp. balsamic vinegar
- 3 Tbsp. Hellmann's® mayonnaise
- 2 Tbsp. water
- 2 cloves garlic, pressed
- 1 tsp. Dijon mustard
- 2 tsp. dark brown sugar
- 3 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- kosher salt, to taste
- ground black pepper, to taste

DIRECTIONS

Sauce

1. In a Dutch oven, cook and crumble the ground beef over medium heat until browned.
2. Remove the cooked beef to a paper towel-lined plate and set aside.
3. Add 1 tablespoon of olive oil to the pan over medium heat. Add the sliced mushrooms, diced onion, diced bell pepper and garlic.
4. Sauté the vegetables until soft and the onions are translucent.
5. Add the remaining ingredients, except for the pasta, and stir to combine. Once combined, stir in the ground beef.
6. Bring the mixture to a simmer and reduce the heat to low. Cover the Dutch oven and cook the spaghetti sauce over low heat throughout the day, or at least 4 hours.
7. If preferred, the spaghetti sauce can be transferred to a slow cooker on low.
8. Store any leftovers in the refrigerator or freeze the leftover marinara for later use.

Meatballs

1. Preheat the oven to 350 F and prepare a rimmed sheet pan with cooking spray.
2. In a large bowl, stir together the ground beef, Italian sausage, bread crumbs, onion, parsley, garlic, salt and pepper until combined.
3. Add the Worcestershire sauce, beaten egg and milk, mixing, until the ingredients come together.
4. Gently shape into 1 ½ to 2-inch balls.
5. In a large skillet, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the meatballs and brown on all sides, about 2 to 3 minutes. Continue until all the meatballs are browned, adding more olive oil as needed.
6. Transfer the browned meatballs onto the sheet pan and place in the oven.
7. Bake for 20 minutes or until a thermometer inserted in the center of the meatballs reads 165 F.
8. Remove from the oven and serve with vermicelli and sauce.

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 400 F.
2. Toss beets in olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper.
3. Wrap each beet individually in aluminum foil and place them on a baking sheet.
4. Roast the beets for 45-60 minutes, until tender when pierced with a fork.
5. Remove from the oven and let cool slightly. Once cool enough to handle, peel the beets and cut into wedges or slices.
6. Prepare the dressing: Blend the balsamic vinegar, mayonnaise, water, garlic, mustard and brown sugar in a blender. Slowly add the olive oil until all ingredients are combined. Add salt and pepper to the dressing, to taste.
7. In a large bowl, toss the mixed greens with the vinaigrette until evenly coated. You will have leftover dressing that can be refrigerated.
8. Arrange the roasted beets on top of the greens.
9. Lay sliced onions on top of the salad.
10. Sprinkle with cheese and toasted pecans.

NOTE: If you are in a hurry, you can purchase cooked beets in the produce section of your grocery store.





Easy Tortoni Coconut *Macaroon*

ICE CREAM

Prep Time: 5 minutes

Chill Time: At least 2 hours

Yield: Makes 1 ½ quarts

INGREDIENTS

8 coconut macaroon cookies (best from a bakery, but crisp coconut macaroons can be substituted)

1 ½ quarts vanilla ice cream, softened

⅓ cup ground roasted unsalted almonds

2 Tbsp. amaretto liqueur

1 Tbsp. grenadine

cherries, optional

whipped cream, optional

laced cookies, optional

DIRECTIONS

1. Crush most of the cookies in a food processor. Leave a few of the cookies in bigger pieces.
2. In a large bowl, stir cookies, ice cream, ground almonds, amaretto, and grenadine together. Continue stirring until well combined.
3. Refreeze the ice cream in the freezer for at least 2 hours.
4. When ready to serve, top with a cherry, whipped cream and a laced cookie, if desired.