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## Next time, make it a Girls' Night In

By **DAWN ALBRECHT**

Posted: *May 10, 2008*

A night with friends is a great way to reconnect and get inspired. Whether it's a writers' group, friends from work or neighborhood moms, trying to find a time and location to meet isn't always easy with busy schedules and tight budgets. Having a girls' night in is a fun approach to get everyone together.



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If everyone in your group is coming directly from work, or if your friends all love to cook, try making cooking part of the evening. While there are chefs you can hire to come to your house to cook, sharing techniques among friends can be just as rewarding and less expensive.

Another way to add a little flavor is make your Girls Night In a wine tasting. Ask everyone to bring a bottle of wine and send your friends a list of the appetizers for the evening. They can pair their wine choice with one of the appetizers.

Most wine stores and some grocery stores will help select a wine for a specific food. I've had great success with inexpensive wines recommended by employees both in wine shops and grocery store wine departments.

Quick additions to fill out your appetizer menu include olives stuffed with garlic, mixed nuts, brie and crackers, fresh vegetables or fruit, and salsa or guacamole with chips.

Food always tastes better when shared among friends!

### RECIPES

The next three recipes are from Cooking Light magazine.

Healthy appetizers are a great way to try new foods and share some of your favorites with friends. Recipes with overlapping ingredients help to reduce the cost of the evening and provide a subtle link in your menu. Chives and feta cheese, for example, are used in more than one of the suggested recipes here. Be sure to include sweet as well as savory items on your menu.

Using some recipes that can be made well ahead of time, such as dips or these Mini Bacon and Potato Frittatas, with others that can be put together quickly, lets you have a diverse menu with minimal last-minute cooking.

#### Gatherings



Photo/Benny Sieu

Chipotle Shrimp Cups (center, foreground) surrounded by Endive Stuffed with Goat Cheese and Walnuts, and Mini Bacon and Potato Frittatas, as well as Pancetta Crisps with Goat Cheese (background), make a good combination of appetizers.

#### Girls' Night In

- Endive Stuffed with Goat Cheese and Walnuts
- Mini Bacon and Potato Frittatas
- Chipotle Shrimp Cups
- Pancetta Crisps with Goat Cheese and Pear
- Mixed nuts
- Garlic-stuffed olives
- Assorted white wines
- (Pinot Grigio, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay)

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## Endive Stuffed with Goat Cheese and Walnuts

**Makes 16**

- 1/3 cup chopped walnuts
  - 2 tablespoons honey (divided)
  - ¼ cup balsamic vinegar
  - 3 tablespoons orange juice
  - 16 Belgian endive leaves (about 2 heads)
  - 16 small orange sections (about 2 navel oranges)
  - 1/3 cup (1 ½ ounces) crumbled goat cheese or blue cheese
  - 1 tablespoon minced fresh chives
  - ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Combine walnuts and 1 tablespoon honey; spread on a baking sheet coated with vegetable oil spray. Bake in preheated oven 10 minutes, stirring after 5 minutes.

In small saucepan, combine remaining 1 tablespoon honey, the vinegar and orange juice. Bring mixture to a boil over high heat and cook until reduced to 3 tablespoons, about 5 minutes.

Fill each endive leaf with 1 orange section. Top each with 1 teaspoon cheese and about 1 teaspoon walnuts; arrange on a plate. Drizzle vinegar mixture evenly over leaves and sprinkle evenly with chives and pepper.

## Mini Bacon and Potato Frittatas

**Makes 3 dozen**

- 2 cups finely chopped peeled baking potato (about 12 ounces)
- 5 bacon slices (uncooked)
- ½ cup minced sweet onion
- 1 teaspoon salt (divided)
- ¼ teaspoon dried thyme
- ½ cup chopped fresh chives (divided)
- 2 tablespoons grated freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper

7 large egg whites, lightly beaten

3 large eggs, lightly beaten

6 tablespoons light or fat-free sour cream

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

Place potato in medium saucepan; cover with water. Bring to a boil; cook 4 minutes, until almost tender. Drain.

In large non-stick skillet over medium heat, cook bacon until crisp. Remove bacon from pan, reserving 2 teaspoons drippings in pan. Crumble bacon; set aside. Add potato, onion, ¼ teaspoon salt and thyme to drippings; cook 8 minutes, until potato is light brown over medium-high heat. Remove from heat; cool.

Combine potato mixture, bacon, remaining ¼ teaspoon salt, 2 tablespoons chives, cheese, pepper, egg whites and eggs, whisking well. Coat 36 mini-muffin cups with vegetable oil spray. Spoon about 1 tablespoon egg mixture into each muffin cup. Bake in preheated oven 16 minutes, until lightly browned. Cool 5 minutes on rack. Remove frittatas from muffin cups. Top each with ½ teaspoon sour cream and ½ teaspoon chives.

## Chipotle Shrimp Cups

**Makes 3 dozen**

36 won ton wrappers

1 ½ cups (6 ounces) shredded reduced-fat sharp cheddar cheese

1 cup chopped cooked shrimp

1 cup chopped bottled roasted red bell peppers

1 cup bottled chipotle salsa

½ cup chopped green onions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Fit 1 won ton wrapper into each of 36 mini-muffin cups coated with cooking spray, pressing the wrappers into sides of cups. Bake at 350 degrees 7 minutes or until lightly browned. Keep won tons in muffin cups.

Combine cheese and remaining ingredients and spoon about 1 tablespoon cheese mixture into each won ton cup. Bake at 350 degrees 6 minutes or until cheese melts. Remove from muffin cups. Serve immediately.

This recipe is from Southern Living magazine.

## Pancetta Crisps with Goat Cheese and Pear

### Makes 6 servings

12 thin slices pancetta (about 1/3 pound)

1 Bartlett pear

2 ounces goat cheese, crumbled

Freshly cracked pepper to taste

Honey

Fresh thyme sprigs for garnish

Preheat oven to 450 degrees.

Arrange pancetta slices in a single layer on an aluminum foil-lined baking sheet.

Bake in preheated oven 8 to 10 minutes or until golden. Transfer to a paper towel-lined wire rack using a spatula. Let stand 10 minutes or until crisp.

Core pear with an apple corer. Cut pear crosswise into 12 thin rings. Arrange on a serving platter. Top evenly with pancetta and goat cheese; sprinkle with pepper. Drizzle with honey just before serving. Garnish, if desired, with thyme.

*Dawn Albrecht is a New Berlin-based freelance writer focusing on two of her favorite topics, food and family. Contact her at [dawn@dawnalbrecht.com](mailto:dawn@dawnalbrecht.com).*

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