

# Vegetarian: Martini, punch, skewers, and stuffed peppers

By J.M. Hirsch  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CONCORD, N.H. — Forget pairing foods and wine. I need help matching up appetizers and cookies.

This will be our second year hosting a holiday cookie-swap party, a festive, if fattening, way to get together with friends while enjoying good food and drink without having to do all the heavy lifting in the kitchen.

The concept is pretty simple: Invite a dozen or so friends or couples, asking each to bring two to three dozen of their favorite holiday cookies (depending on the number of intended guests).

During the party, your guests can sample the various cookies. At the end they get to take home a few of each.

It's simple, but it still benefits from a bit of planning. For example, be sure to ask guests to include in their R.S.V.P. the type of cookie they will bring. This will make it easier to avoid a dozen batches of chocolate chip cookies.

Also, we learned that left to their own devices, guests sometimes are too polite to assemble their own cookie assortments at the end of the evening. Thus were we left with dozens and dozens of cookies after last year's gathering.

Our solution this year relies on pastry boxes we bought from a candy and baking supply shop. Now as guests arrive, we plan to set aside half their cookies right away and divide them among the boxes. As guests leave, we will hand them variety boxes ready-to-go.

And though I wasn't organized enough to do it this year, I also like the idea of asking guests to send me their recipes ahead of time. Especially if the recipes are e-mailed, it's quick work to arrange them into a booklet to send people home with.

So that's the party plan. But back to my original problem — what to serve with all those cookies.

Obviously, the first rule must be — nothing sweet. And since this isn't a sit-down party, everything should be finger-friendly.

Coming up with complementary foods can be tough since you don't have control over a good chunk of the menu (and some guests likely won't tell you until the last minute what they are bringing).

Start with drinks. Soda and wine are our party staples, but for this gathering we also like to offer guests a choice between two mixed cocktails.

Last year our invitation offered guests the chance to vote between several options and we served the two most popular.

This year we're being less democratic. To go well with everything, and help cut through the sugar rush, cocktails should be mildly sweet and acidic. Cranberry juice-based drinks are a nice choice, and have the benefit of being festively colored.

This year we've opted for a cranberry, tangerine and pomegranate Champagne punch and a cherry martini, the idea being that only the martini will require actual bartending once guests arrive.

For food, I wanted to keep it simple. The day of the party there will be little time for complex preparations, as we'll likely be cleaning and baking last-minute additions (to round out the party, my wife and I usually each make several varieties of cookies).

Sticking with the color theme set by the drinks, we've decided on skewers of cherry tomatoes, tiny mozzarella balls and fresh basil, and mini sweet peppers stuffed with herbed goat cheese. Both can be made ahead of time and are easy to eat.

Next week: the cookies!  
**Cherry Martini**

(Start to finish 5 minutes)  
1/2 teaspoon cherry-flavored syrup  
1 maraschino cherry  
2 teaspoons chopped papaya or mango  
1 ounce vodka  
Small ice cubes or crushed ice

Pour the cherry-flavored syrup in a martini glass and place the cherry on top. Top with papaya or mango. Carefully pour the vodka over the fruit. Top with a bit of ice. Makes 1 serving.

(Recipe from Better Homes and Gardens magazine, December 1999)

**Cranberry, Tangerine and Pomegranate Champagne Punch With Fresh Cranberry Swizzle Sticks**

(Start to finish 1 hour, 10 minutes active)  
12-ounce package fresh cranberries  
1 bunch fresh mint leaves  
2 cups pomegranate juice  
3 cups tangerine juice (about 7 tangerines)  
5 cups cranberry juice cocktail  
2 bottles chilled Champagne (or other sparkling wine)

To make swizzle sticks, spear three cranberries alternately with two mint leaves on wooden skewers. Prepare 15 to 20 skewers. Place skewers on a baking sheet. Cover with damp paper towels and refrigerate up to one hour.

In a large punch bowl or pitcher, stir together the fruit juices. Fill glasses with ice and ladle about 1/2 cup punch into each glass. Top with Champagne. Garnish each glass with a swizzle stick.

Makes 20 servings.  
(Recipe from Martha Stewart Living magazine, January 2005)

**Tomato-Basil Skewers**  
(Start to finish 5 minutes)  
5 cherry tomatoes  
5 small mozzarella balls  
5 fresh basil leaves  
Extra-virgin olive oil  
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Slice each tomato in half. Thread one half several inches

down a bamboo skewer, cut side facing up. Next thread a basil leaf, followed by one mozzarella ball. Finish with the second half of the tomato, cut side down.

Arrange the completed skewers on a serving plate. Drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Makes 5 skewers.

(Recipe from EatingWell magazine, January 2006)

**Cheese 'n' Herb Mini Sweet Peppers**

(Start to finish 25 minutes)  
30 mini sweet peppers (about 12 ounces), mixed red, yellow and orange  
18 ounces semisoft goat cheese  
1/4 cup finely chopped fresh chives, tarragon, basil or thyme

Leaving the stem intact, cut a slit from the stem to the bottom tip of each pepper. Squeeze gently to open and remove and discard seeds. Set aside.


In a bowl, combine the goat cheese and herbs and mix well. Gently squeezing the peppers to open, carefully spoon in the cheese mixture, allowing some to show outside the pepper. Arrange stuffed

peppers on a platter and garnish with fresh herbs.

Makes 30 peppers.  
(Recipe from Better Homes and Gardens magazine, December 2001)

**PROVIDENCE FAMILY PRACTICE, P.A. CHARLOTTE**

Dr. Augustine Onwukwe



**All Insurances WELCOME**

- Diagnostic Services
- Preventive Services
- Urgent Care Services
- Adult & Pediatric Services
- Physical Therapy
- Occupational Health

427 N. Wendover Rd. • Charlotte, NC 28211  
(Across the street from the Mecklenburg Health Department)  
704.362.2041 • 704.362.2084  
"We care for you, one patient at a time"



**Good neighbors.  
Great prices.**

Stock-Up  
the  
**Pantry  
SALE**



**Boneless Chicken Breast**  
**\$1.99** Lb.  
Without MVP Card \$4.99



**Boneless Pork Half Loin**  
**\$1.99** Lb.  
Without MVP Card \$3.99



**200 Ounce** Liquid Or 63-80 Use Powder Tide Detergent  
**\$9.99**  
Without MVP Card \$13.79



**Canadian Maple Ham**  
**\$3.99** Lb.  
Without MVP Card \$5.99 Lb.



**3 Lb. Bag Sweet, Juicy Tangerines**  
**Buy One, Get One FREE**  
Without MVP Card \$3.99 Each



**8 Rolls** Bounty Paper Towels  
**\$5.49**  
Without MVP Card \$7.99



**20 Ounce** Select Varieties Kellogg's Frosted Flakes  
**Buy One, Get One FREE**  
Without MVP Card \$3.15 Each



**13 Ounce** Select Varieties Doritos  
**Buy One, Get One FREE**  
Without MVP Card \$3.49 Each



**Mountain Grown Fraser Fir Christmas Trees**  
**29.95**



**6 Inch Poinsettias**  
**2/\$10**

Prices in this ad good **NOV.** W T F S S M T **DEC.** 30 1 2 3 4 5 6

We reserve the right to limit quantities and correct typographical and photographic errors. All Stores Accept 

## Upside down tree turns & flips holiday

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LAWRENCE, Kan. — Todd Brabender remembers the December nearly 20 years ago when he and some University of Kansas friends gathered around a Christmas tree hanging upside-down from a water pipe in his apartment.

It seemed like such a crazy idea then. But not anymore. The centerpiece of holiday decorating is more often being inverted—hung from the ceiling or mounted bottom-up on the wall—by those looking to save space, more prominently display pricey ornaments or simply distinguish their Christmas tree from so many millions of others.

Upscale retailer Hammacher Schlemmer sold out of its \$599.95 pre-lit inverted tree, a 7-foot evergreen that rises from a weighted base, before the end of October. Online tree seller ChristmasTreeForMe.com has sold out of two of its four upside-down models. Tree importer Roman Inc. sold out, too.

"This has turned into a worldwide deal," said Bill Quinn, owner of Dallas-based ChristmasTreeForMe.

Odd as it may sound, the trend may have originated long ago. Legend has it that a seventh-century English monk went to Germany and used the triangular shape of the fir tree to explain the Christian belief in a Holy Trinity. Converts came to revere the fir and by the 12th century, the story goes, it was being hung from ceilings at Christmas.

But few believe history is moving the trees out of warehouses and into living rooms.

"My suspicion is that the vast majority are buying them because they seem to be nontraditional," said Edward O'Donnell, an expert on Christmas traditions and history professor at College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass. "It's funny and it's off the wall. Or off the ceiling."

Consumers began buying overturned trees after seeing them on display in stores, said Dan Loughman, a vice president of product development at Roman Inc., which stocks about 200 kinds of trees.

Retailers use the trees because they take up less floor space, Please see UPSIDE /4B