



PICNIC PERFECT

A BETTER WAY TO TAILGATE

BY LAUREN BECKHAM FALCONE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RENEE DEKONA

For Emma Roberts, a pregame party doesn't mean plastic plates and kegs. The president of Capers Catering in Stoneham isn't afraid to break out the bone china and crystal stemware when she's entertaining outside.

In fact, Roberts thinks a fall gridiron get-together is a great time to go gourmet.

"Just having the chance to use that old picnic basket or thermos that was passed down through generations makes you feel a part of the past," said the 40-year-old Rhode Island native. "And so many high-end prepared items are available these days if you don't want to do it yourself. Just because it looks

fancy, doesn't mean it has to kill you."

Roberts, a former ad exec, started Capers from her Marlborough Street apartment 14 years ago. These days, she has a full-time team of 20 and employs some 200 support staff throughout the year.

And though Roberts plans parties for hundreds of clients year-round, she sometimes can't help but take her work home.

"I love to throw many different kinds of parties," she said, describing a recent "Ladies Chinese New Years Party" with Chinese dog invitations (2006 is the year of the dog), Shanghai martinis and a full Chinese buffet. After dinner, "Everyone wrote down a wish on crepe paper and threw them into the fire."

Roberts' secret for a great get-together? A little creativity and a lot of laughs.

"What makes a good party work is a sense of fun, the unexpected, and the tiny details — it is the ooh-ah factor — and of course good food and good company," she said. ▷

EMMA ROBERTS' TIPS FOR TERRIFIC TAILGATING

Equipment:

- Pack lots of ice and ice packs to keep foods at the proper temperature.
- Double-line a book bag with trash bags for a perfect garbage tote.
- For blended drinks, buy a Tailgater, equipped with a motor like a Weedwacker (www.totallygross.com).
- Invest in a pup tent for shade or in case of bad weather.

Planning:

- Prepare most of the menu in advance and invest in pretty to-go containers. Some favorite sources: Target and Crate & Barrel.
- Create a packing list of all the items you need. Never forget a corkscrew again!

Presentation:

- Use clear glass platters, white platters and beautiful antique platters to serve your dishes, and garnish with seasonal fruits, vegetables, herbs and flowers. (Think of each dish as a still life.)
- Mix, don't match glasses. Earthy tones are terrific for outdoor gatherings.
- Buy recyclable disposable plates. Our favorite: bamboo plates at www.bambu.com
- HOLLOWED-OUT PUMPKINS make perfect disposable containers for cold, bottled drinks. Fill with ice and place bottles inside.
- Make your own wet wipes. Boil water with sliced ginger and lemon, pour over white washcloths and roll. Store warm or cold in a small cooler until ready to use.

FOOD CAPERS CATERING, STONEHAM
PROPS, RUG BE OUR GUESTS, BOSTON
CHINA, STEMWARE, LINENS PARTY BY DESIGN, BRAINTREE

MENU

Sweet and Salty Bird Feed
 Harvest Parfait Salad
 Lobster Stew with Corn and Chives
 Crumbly Chicken Sandwiches
 with Red Cabbage and Apple Slaw
 Apple Cranberry Crisp
 with Lemon Sauce
 Beer, cider



Prepare the slaw: Mix cabbage, onion and apple in a large bowl. Place rest of ingredients in a medium bowl and blend with a wire whisk until well-combined to make a dressing. Pour dressing over cabbage mixture and stir well.

Compose the sandwich: Place freshly fried chicken on potato roll and top with ½ c. coleslaw.

SERVES 8

APPLE-CRANBERRY CRISP WITH LEMON SAUCE

3 ½ lbs. Cortland or Macoun apples, peeled and sliced
 1 c. cranberries

For the topping:

1 c. all-purpose flour
 1 c. light brown sugar
 ½ c. butter
 ¼ T. salt
 ¾ c. oatmeal
 ½ T. cinnamon

For the lemon sauce:

1 c. water
 1 c. granulated sugar
 ¾ c. butter
 2 T. cornstarch
 ½ T. lemon peel
 1 T. lemon juice

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Peel and slice apples. Mix together dry ingredients for topping; cut in butter and blend until crumbly.

In 1 qt. saucepan, place butter, sugar, cornstarch, lemon zest and juice. Add 1 c. boiling water and cook over medium heat, stirring, until thickened.

Place half the crumb mixture in the bottom of a 4 qt. casserole and press down firmly. Add apples and cranberries. Pour lemon sauce over apples. Top with remainder of crumbs. Bake for one hour until crisp.

SERVES 8 TO 10 ▷



SWEET & SALTY BIRD FEED

2 T. sesame oil
 ½ c. honey
 dash of cayenne pepper
 2 c. pepitas (pumpkin seeds), hulled
 ½ c. sesame seeds
 ½ c. shredded coconut
 dash of fine sea salt

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Put oil, honey and cayenne in a tall-sided skillet and place on burner set to medium heat. Allow mixture to simmer for two minutes, then remove from heat. Mix the remaining ingredients in a bowl, then add slowly to the honey mixture. Stir well to coat all ingredients. Spread in one layer on baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Bake for 10 to 12 minutes. Sprinkle with salt and allow to cool.

SERVES 6-10



CRUMBLY CHICKEN SANDWICH WITH RED CABBAGE AND APPLE SLAW

For the chicken sandwiches:

8 skinless, boneless chicken breasts (about 6 oz. each)
 4 c. buttermilk
 ½ c. Tabasco sauce
 ½ c. fresh lemon juice
 4 t. salt
 4 t. pepper
 2 qt. frying oil
 4 c. all-purpose flour
 2 T. salt
 2 T. pepper
 2 t. cayenne pepper
 8 sandwich-sized potato rolls

For the slaw:

1 small red cabbage, finely shredded
 4 T. thinly sliced red onion
 2 large Granny Smith apples, grated
 6 T. honey
 4 T. lemon juice
 dash of cayenne
 ½ c. canola oil
 2 T. chopped parsley
 ½ T. dry mustard
 4 t. Dijon mustard
 2 t. Tabasco
 2 t. cumin
 1 t. salt
 1 t. pepper

Prepare the chicken: Combine buttermilk, Tabasco, lemon juice, salt and pepper in a large bowl. Add chicken breasts, turning to coat with marinade. Cover and marinate 6 hours or overnight.

Stir together flour, salt, pepper and cayenne. Dredge chicken in seasoned flour. Heat oil in fryer or large skillet to to 350 degrees. Fry chicken until brown and crisp. Drain on paper towels.

LOBSTER STEW WITH CORN AND CHIVES

- 2 c. diced carrots
- 2 c. medium diced onions
- 2 c. medium diced celery
- ½ c. butter
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 T. tomato paste
- ½ c. all-purpose flour
- 4 c. sherry
- 4 c. heavy cream
- 6 c. clam broth
- 4 bay leaves
- 4 t. chopped thyme
- salt and white pepper
- 2 lb. cooked lobster meat, cut in ½-inch dice
- 4 c. fresh corn kernels
- 4 T. paprika
- 8 T. chives, minced

Saute carrots, onions and celery in butter until onions are translucent. Add garlic and saute for two minutes. Add tomato paste and flour and cook until the flour is totally combined and "toasted." Add sherry and reduce by half.

Add cream and broth slowly and blend with a wire whip to remove any flour lumps. Add bay leaf and thyme. Simmer over medium heat about 40 minutes, until stew thickens slightly. Turn heat to low and adjusting the seasoning with salt and white pepper to taste.

To serve, warm eight individual soup bowls or tureens. Place 4 oz. lobster and ½ c. corn kernels in each bowl. Ladle stew into each, sprinkle with paprika and garnish with minced chives.

SERVES 8

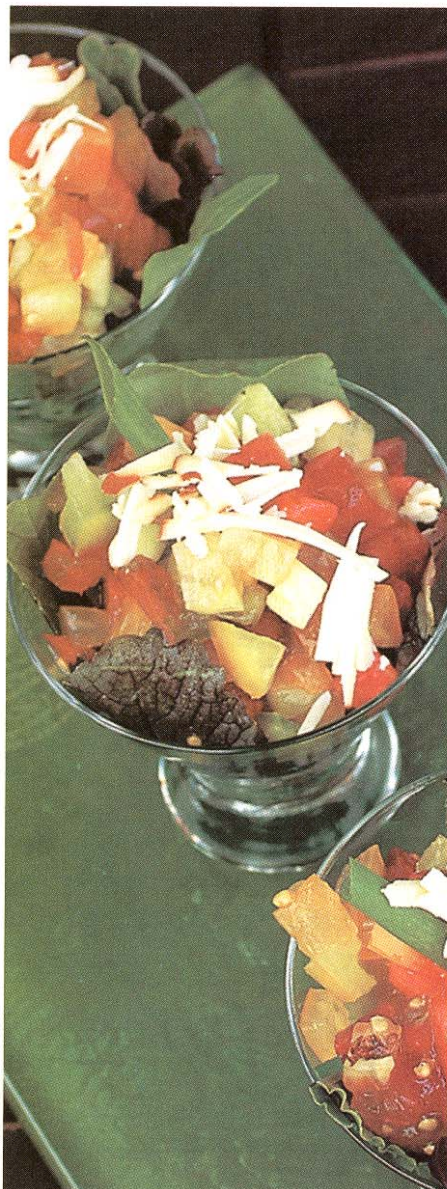
HARVEST PARFAIT SALAD

Wild mushroom salad:

- 2 T. minced shallots
- 1 c. olive oil
- 4 lbs. mixed wild mushrooms (we used equal parts shiitake, cremini, trumpet and lobster mushrooms)
- 1 c. sherry
- 4 t. chopped fresh thyme
- 4 t. chopped marjoram
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 T. truffle oil
- 4 T. fresh lemon juice

Tomato salad:

- 4 lbs. heirloom tomatoes, medium dice
- 6 T. extra-virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste



Green salad:

- Two 16 oz. bags of mesclun
- 2 T. maple syrup
- 4 T. malt vinegar
- 4 t. molasses
- 6 T. olive oil
- 4 t. dijon

Garnish:

- 2 c. grated smoked gouda

Prepare mushroom salad: Saute shallots in olive oil. Add mushrooms and saute over medium-high heat till lightly brown. Deglaze pan with sherry. Add thyme, marjoram, salt and pepper. Cool and finish with truffle oil and lemon juice.

Prepare tomato salad: Toss tomatoes in olive oil and salt and pepper to taste.

Prepare greens: Wash and dry mesclun greens. Mix syrup, vinegar, molasses, olive oil and dijon in bowl to make dressing. Toss greens with dressing just before serving.

To serve: Assemble individual parfaits in 8 large martini glasses. Place small amount of dressed greens in bottom of each glass. Top greens with ¼ c. tomatoes. Top tomatoes with ¼ c. mushrooms. Sprinkle each parfait with grated gouda and top with more tomatoes. ■

SERVES 8