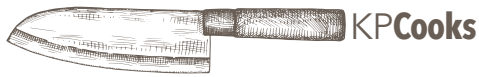


## Simple Spring Party Food



KPCooks

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The past two years of Covid isolation have left many of us out of practice when it comes to socializing and hosting guests. Like our weather at times, dark clouds, rain, sun breaks, maybe a rainbow, the Covid lifespan has felt like one of our Northwest spring days. Seeing familiar faces and catching up with dear friends is the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. The food is the colorful arcing conveyance to a wonderful time.

To encourage you to take those hesitant steps back into society, here are a few of my favorite recipes that honor the spring season and would be perfect for a potluck, luncheon or small gathering. Save yourself some stress and make these mostly in advance, assembling them before guests arrive. Enjoy!

### Smoked Salmon Dip

Disguised as a cheesecake, this dip has a wow factor and is awesome for a potluck, feeding plenty with six good sized wedges.

First, make a cracker crust by combining one sleeve of saltine crackers, crushed fine with 4 tablespoons of melted butter. Press into a 9-inch pie pan and chill for at least an hour.

For the filling, beat 12 ounces of softened cream cheese, 2 eggs, 2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice, 2 dashes of Tabasco and 1 teaspoon of seafood seasoning. Next, blend in 4 ounces of finely chopped smoked salmon, including any liquid. Pour into the pie crust and bake in a 350 F preheated oven for 30 minutes. For topping, blend 1 cup of sour cream, 1 egg, salt and white pepper to taste. Spread topping on baked pie and return to the oven for 10 more minutes. Chill pie and when ready to serve, garnish with sliced cucumbers and cherry tomatoes.

### Peanut Butter and Jelly Scallops

Sounds a little crazy but this easy seafood recipe has its origins in Thai chicken satay, and all the flavors blend nicely together.

First comes the fresh pickled cucumbers. Slice a cucumber into disks that can hold the scallop but not so big that they overwhelm the dish. The brine is made up of 1 cup rice wine vinegar, 2 tablespoons sugar, 1 teaspoon salt, 1 tablespoon dried dill and 1 tablespoon olive oil. Mix the brine and add the cucumbers. Put in more vinegar to cover cucumbers if needed. Chill.

Next, make a peanut butter sauce with any nut butter without added sugar. In a microwaveable bowl mix 4 tablespoons nut butter, 2 tablespoons butter, 2 tablespoons white wine, 1 tablespoon soy sauce, 1 tablespoon oil and 1 tablespoon rice wine vinegar. Microwave for 45 seconds. Add ¼ to ½ of a cup of coconut milk, mix and set aside.

To cook scallops, pat dry with a paper towel and sear on a hot skillet with 1 tablespoon butter and 1 tablespoon olive oil for 2 minutes on each side. Place warm scallops in peanut sauce and chill.

Lastly, to make jam, cook 3 slices of bacon, crumble and set aside. With 2 tablespoons of bacon grease or 2 tablespoons olive oil, sauté 2 cloves of garlic, thinly sliced, 1 habanero pepper, and 2 tablespoons shallots or green onions, finely minced. Cook for 3 minutes over medium heat. Add 2 cups of fresh strawberries (if the berries are tart, you can add 2 tablespoons sugar) and cook for 10 more minutes. Slightly mash strawberries and add bacon to the pan. Turn the heat to medium low and cook until thick.

To assemble, drain cucumbers well and set out on a platter as a base or place on a cracker if you like. Top cucumber with cold scallop and add a dollop of warm bacon jam, heated slightly in the microwave. This strawberry bacon jam also works well on deviled eggs and the scallops can be substituted with shrimp or chicken.

### Oysters Rockefeller

Many variations of this classic all feature the versatile vegetable of spinach with a rich hollandaise-like sauce. My version takes out a lot of the calories. The oysters can be shucked, cutting the muscle and left in the boat side of the shell. Place on a rock salt- or crumpled foil-lined cookie sheet to keep them from tipping over.

You can also put them on the grill, boat side down and the heat will steam open the oyster. Pop off the top of the shell and put on a tray to load up the toppings and then return the oysters to the grill.

When oysters are not available in the shell, I often use jarred oysters and put them in a custard cup or an empty oyster shell. If the oysters are larger, you can cut them in half to fit. We make this so often I have a bag of old oyster shells that I clean, sanitize and reuse just for this dish.

Frozen spinach is a little easier to use than fresh. Thaw, squeeze dry and season with 1 tablespoon of olive oil, 1 teaspoon nutmeg, salt and pepper to taste. Place 1 tablespoon of spinach on top of the oyster. Cover with 1 tablespoon of hollandaise.

When cooking for large gatherings, I like to use McCormick's Hollandaise Sauce and vegan butter, or you can make a simple blender hollandaise with 3 egg yolks, 2 tablespoons of fresh squeezed lemon juice and a dash of cayenne or Tabasco. Blend quickly off and on. Melt ½ cup butter in the microwave until almost boiling, pour into the blender slowly and blend for 30 seconds.

Spoon hollandaise over spinach and top with a good pinch of grated Parmesan cheese. Put oysters back on the grill (if you used it) or put your baking sheet in a 375° F oven until the cheese is golden brown, about 10 to 15 minutes. Serve with your favorite hot sauce and a fresh lemon wedge.

We'd love to feature a dish from your KP kitchen that friends and family ask for. Email the details to [editor@keypennews.org](mailto:editor@keypennews.org) with your phone number; we'll be in touch. (Don't worry, we do most of the writing.)