

Dining on a Dime!

RECIPE DEVELOPMENT, FOOD STYLING, PHOTOGRAPHY, AND ARTICLE BY LIZ BUSHONG



February may bring cold winds and snow showers, but there's a bright spot in all of this wintery bliss, a healthy meal with a pretty table ushering in the promise of spring and dining on a dime.

I hope you are hungry, because here is a budget-friendly menu for light supper at home. Melt away the icy chill with a hearty tomato bacon soup, triple cheese "spoons" and for dessert, a mouthwatering chocolate meringue brownie with cashew caramel sauce.

If the past season has left you money hungry, this menu will help you stretch a dollar. Purchasing seasonal foods is a healthy and cost-effective way to approach menu planning and shopping. Grocery stores tend to purchase in-bulk seasonal items because they are plentiful, making them less expensive for you—especially when they go on sale. Vegetables such as cabbage, Brussels sprouts, onions, garlic, and carrots are just a few seasonal foods that were used in this menu. There are many other vegetables to select from too, ranging from arugula to turnip greens. Ask your produce manager what items are seasonal and they should be able to help you.

Serve it Up Sassy

Our menu has five seasonal items including the vegetables in the centerpiece. The onions, garlic and carrots were cooked in the savory tomato soup along with canned tomatoes. The triple cheese spoons and chocolate meringue brownies were baked to perfection using basics from a well-stocked pantry. If you don't have a stocked pantry, begin to add one or two extra items each time you shop to keep your pantry ready for those impromptu meals. A good resource for stocking your pantry is budgetbytes.com.

Blooming in the midst of a cold winter and reaching toward the warmth of the sun, white Lenten roses are the welcomed centerpiece for this light supper. The roses were not purchased but cut from the backyard. The base of a green head of cabbage provided an interesting container for the arrangement. The Brussels sprouts surrounding the cabbage compliment the dark green leaves of the Lenten roses. The cabbage is hollowed in the center and holds a small glass container for water. After the flowers are spent, you can use the cabbage and Brussels sprouts for another meal or two. A great way to save money is to use seasonal vegetables and fruits as part of your centerpiece.

Decorate your table with what you have, begin with the white dinner plate and add colorful salad plates or bowls to the setting. Fold a pretty napkin and tuck it under the salad plate. In this sassyscape, the \$3.00 centerpiece set the tone for this green, white and black color scheme. The napkin is a tea towel. Be creative and make your table your own by using what you already have available. Perhaps you have extra lemons or limes around; you could create a scheme from those two colors. Inspiration is all around you. Take the time to find it.

February may indeed bring cold winds and snow showers, but there is always a bright spot in each and every day no matter what the season brings. A pretty table, a fulfilling meal and the satisfaction knowing you didn't over spend makes every day a little bit brighter and less stressful. Dining on a Dime can help you usher in the promise of spring with a big smile on your face and money in your pocket. **VIP**



Savory Bacon Tomato Soup with Avocado Sauce

Serve it up Sassy!® www.lizbushong.com

2 strips of market fresh bacon
 ½ cup chopped yellow onion
 ½ teaspoon salt
 ¼ teaspoon pepper
 1 large carrot, peeled, diced
 2 cloves garlic, minced
 ½ cup canned tomato sauce
 2-12 ounce can diced tomatoes basil,
 garlic and oregano
 3 cups chicken broth

GARNISH
 Avocado Sauce
 ½ cup bacon bits-divided
 8-10 Chive stems

AVOCADO SAUCE
 ¼ cup yogurt or sour cream
 1-tablespoons water
 ½-avocado, mashed

INSTRUCTIONS:

In large saucepan, fry bacon. Remove bacon but reserve oil. Sauté onions, garlic and carrots in the bacon oil on medium heat for 5 minutes. Stir until onions are transparent and soft.

Add tomato paste and canned diced tomatoes. Add broth, salt and pepper.

Simmer for 45 minutes.

In blender or using hand emulsifier, puree the soup in batches until smooth, return to saucepan over medium heat. Serve soup in individual bowls.

Make avocado sauce; mix all ingredients together until smooth.

Top each bowl with avocado sauce, crumbled bacon bits and chive stems.

Serve with Three Cheese Cheddar Spoons.

Yield: 4 -6 servings



Three-Cheese Spoons (Straws)

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16 ounces extra-sharp cheddar cheese, grated
 4 ounces sharp white cheddar cheese, grated
 4 ounces Parmesan cheese, grated
 1 stick butter- land a lakes
 ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper or more as desired
 ½ teaspoon salt
 2 cups all purpose flour
 Garnish: white sesame seeds-optional

INSTRUCTIONS:

In food processor with steel blade, or with a mixer, cream the butter and cheeses until fluffy and smooth. Add cayenne, salt and flour and process the dough until the dough gathers inside the bowl.

Preheat oven to 325. Remove dough and wrap in plastic wrap, refrigerate for 25 minutes or longer. When ready to roll out, the dough should be pliable and easy to roll. You might need to knead the dough to make it pliable and easier to roll.

Roll dough on flour surface to a little more than 1/8 inch thick - these will puff slightly during baking. (¼ inch is to thick, unless you want a thicker spoon) Cut desired shapes using cookie cutters or a spoon cut out.

On a parchment lined double baking sheet space each spoon 1/4 inch apart. Brush spoon with water then sprinkle with sesame seeds or other grain. Bake in oven for 10-12 minutes or until puffed and brown. Allow to cool on pan before removing to avoid breakage.

Store in airtight container after cooled. These freeze well. Serve with soups, salads or as appetizer mini's.

Yield: about 40 spoons

Chocolate Meringue Brownies with Cashew Caramel Sauce

Serve it up Sassy!® www.lizbushong.com

1-8x8 inch square pan full of baked brownies- use favorite mix or recipe
1 cup chocolate frosting, purchased or home-made
Chocolate Meringue
½ cup confectioner's sugar, sifted
1 ½ tablespoons unsweetened special dark cocoa
2 egg whites, room temperature
¼ cup granulated sugar
Cashew Caramel Sauce
½ cup purchased caramel sauce
½ cup whole cashews

INSTRUCTIONS FOR MERINGUE AND CASHEW CARAMEL SAUCE

Preheat oven to 225 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Trace 8- 2 ½ inch round cookie cutter size on to parchment paper. Turn paper over. Set aside

In small bowl, sift confectioners sugar with cocoa, set aside.

In large mixing bowl, using wire whisk, beat egg whites until soft peaks form.

Gradually add granulated sugar to egg whites, beat until stiff peaks form.

Gradually add confectioners and cocoa mixture, beat to blend.
Peaks will be lost.

Spoon mixture into zip lock bag, close bag, clip one end to 1/8 inch, pipe circles onto parchment paper.

Bake meringues in oven for 20- 25 minutes or until firm. Open oven door slightly and cool completely.

In small bowl, combine cashews with caramel sauce. Set aside.

TO ASSEMBLE:

Cut brownies into 4 -2 ½ inch circles using cutter for meringues. Frost each brownie top with chocolate frosting. On serving plate, layer one meringue upright, brownie round, top with meringue. With spoon drizzle cashew caramel sauce over meringue brownie dessert.

Yield: 4 servings



Make a Statement, Make it Sassy, and Make it Yours!



Liz Bushong is an expert in the three-dimensional art of entertaining. She transforms simple dining occasions into beautiful and memorable moments by adding a touch of her own "sassy" style. In 2009, 2010, and 13, she was selected from thousands nationwide to be part of an elite team of 100 professionals entrusted with decorating the White House for the Holiday. In 2014 she was invited as a designer to the White House to assist with a 4th of July event. In 2011, she was part of seven-person team selected to decorate the Tennessee Governor's Mansion for the holiday.

Liz has been featured as the monthly guest chef on *Daytime Tri-Cities*, television show on WJHL, the CBS Affiliate for the Tri- Cities Area of Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, *Daytime Blue Ridge* in Roanoke, Virginia and *Daytime Tampa*, Tampa Florida. She is also the creator and host of her own one-hour seasonal television show called "Serve it up Sassy!" for the same market, which aired in 2011. She is also a contributing writer for the regional magazine *VIP Seen* and *Lovely Bella* magazine in Roanoke, Virginia.

She has a Bachelor of Science Degree in Consumer and Family Sciences from Purdue University and an Associate in Applied Science degree in Fashion Design from The Fashion Institute of Technology in New York. She is also certified in Decorative Finishes and has been trained as a volunteer Master Gardener.

Liz is the author of the *Just Desserts* and *Sweets & Savories* cookbook. Liz makes her home in Johnson City, Tennessee. She continues to perfect her sassy approach to turning simple dining occasions into beautiful and memorable moments.

To purchase cookbooks, find recipes, cooking, and decorating ideas, go to www.lizbushong.com. Like and Share Liz on Facebook, tweet @lizbushong and pin on pinterest.com/lizbushong.

