



Soup Shooters, a novelty offering at a party, makes a seasonal splash with pumpkin soup. Also shown, roasted avocado tortilla soup and blackened lobster bisque.



Thai beef cucumber cups.

CATER YOUR OWN PARTY

UNUSUAL APPETIZERS FOR YOUR FESTIVE GET-TOGETHERS

BY ELAINE ROGERS

Sweater weather and the calendar tell us that Thanksgiving is just a few short weeks away, a reality that brings thoughts of houseguests and holiday meals to the fore. For many, the approach of the annual holiday season is all about scouring cookbooks and surfing the net for recipes that will bring something new to the table for the traditional feast and a slew of secondary events—annual office parties, club socials and even short-notice gatherings both before and after the big day.

Caterers, of course, are the go-to specialists for party food ideas and culinary creations sure to make an impression, so we asked the experts at Two Sisters Catering, a top Metroplex operation, for some special pre- or post-Thanksgiving ideas. A flurry of ideas led to the following collection: pumpkin soup shooters (nicely served in shot glasses or in hollowed pumpkin or squash “bowls”); Thai beef cucumber cups and a fruity favorite, spiced cinnamon pecan fruit dip.

“The soup shooters and the others are fun, unique and different,” says Two Sisters’ event specialist, Melissa Mihelich. “That’s the kind of thing we always strive to provide because your guests will always remember the party if they had something really unusual there.”

Mihelich notes that such menu offerings are well suited to cocktail party situations and achieve the purpose of providing sustenance without requiring a sit-down course. “They’re light and easy to eat, so they’re good for events where your guests have a beverage in one hand and

they’re mingling and socializing,” she explains. “That’s good for all of us because we don’t need to eat heavy at every function, especially if we want to keep those holiday pants fitting through the season.”

Two Sisters specializes in corporate lunches and events, private parties and weddings, and Mihelich says the business has grown exponentially since 1989 when founder Connie Chantilis along with her sister Rosanne Herskind launched a home-based box lunch business. Eventually, it became a one sister operation as Herskind left to pursue other ventures and Chantilis expanded to a commercial cooking facility, subsequently opening a Two Sisters To-Go location in Highland Park for an increasingly popular selection of casual lunches and take-home meals. By 1999, another move situated Two Sisters on Gaston Avenue near downtown Dallas and launched a second storefront.

With the company earning accolades as “best caterer in Dallas” by media sources such as the Dallas Business Journal and Park Cities People, executive chef and general manager Jonathan Stirnweis has kept the buzz going since joining the operation in 2002, and Mihelich says he continues to develop new recipes for a versatile and varied list on view at twosisterscatering.com.

While the attached recipes are sure to inspire, those who find holiday parties overly stressful will also appreciate the company’s catering options. For instance, Two Sisters To Go offers holiday dinners in a bag for both Thanksgiving and Christmas (priced at \$135 and \$150, respectively). Prepared for 6 to 8 diners, the Thanksgiving meal accents a rosemary, sage and lemon zest roasted turkey breast with extras such as shaved pumpkin green salad, jalapeño-cheddar artisan bread and cranberry-orange chutney.

Pumpkin Soup / Soup Shooters

4 ounces butter (1 stick)
8 ounces onion (1 large onion, rough chopped)
5 ounces celery (2 stalks, cleaned, rough chopped)
12 ounces carrots (2 large, peeled, rough chopped)
1 ounce garlic, chopped (4 cloves)
1.5 quarts chicken stock (6 cups)
1 quart heavy cream
1.5 pounds fresh pumpkin, peeled and chopped, or 1 can {15oz} solid pack pumpkin
2.5 ounces maple syrup
1 ounce ground cloves (or to taste)
1 ounce ground nutmeg (or to taste)
salt and pepper to taste

Melt butter over medium high heat. Sauté onions until soft, add celery and carrots; cook 10 more minutes. Add garlic and cook for 1 to 2 minutes until garlic starts to stick and slightly browns.

Add pumpkin. If using fresh pumpkin, sauté for 5 minutes. Add stock and simmer for 25 minutes until pumpkin is soft. If using canned pumpkin, sauté for 8 minutes, until color begins to darken, then add stock and cook 10 minutes more.

Add cream, maple syrup and seasoning. Cook for 10 to 15 minutes until soup thickens slightly.

Puree soup with a stick blender or working in small batches with a bar blender. Adjust seasoning and enjoy.

Welcome the holidays and intrigue your guests with pumpkin soup shooters.

For meals and larger servings, the soup may be served in hollowed squash or pumpkin bowls. Food photography courtesy Two sisters Catering.



Unique presentation ideas:

For soup shooters, serve in shot glasses, garnished with vanilla infused whipped heavy cream. For a more seasonal presentation during holiday meals, the soup may be served in festive pumpkin or squash “bowls.”

To make: Remove 1/4 inch from the bottom of a pumpkin or squash; trim slowly and carefully until the item has a flat base to rest. To avoid leaking, be very careful not to cut into the hollow center.

Trim one inch of top and discard; remove seeds and center core. Place on baking sheet, brush tops with oil and broil until tops began to color. Cool until ready to serve.

When ready, reheat pumpkin or squash for 10 minutes at 250 degrees to remove the chill before serving. Place on a soup plate, add soup, garnish and serve.

Thai Beef Cucumber Cups

(makes 24 “cups”)

Marinate and cook beef

1 pound beef (tenderloin, or flank)

Marinade

1 cup soy sauce

1/2 cup honey

4 tablespoons fish sauce

3 tablespoons fresh orange juice

1 tablespoon cilantro, rough chopped

1 tablespoon mint leaves, rough chopped

1 tablespoon fresh lime juice

2 tablespoons Chili garlic sauce

3 cloves garlic

2 tablespoons ginger, peeled and diced

Mix marinade ingredients in a blender until combined. Pour into a bowl; add steak. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate at least 4 hours. Heat grill (or pan sear) to medium-high. Cook steak until medium rare, about 2 1/2 minutes per side for flank steak. Chill beef.



Preparing the cucumber cups:

Filling:

1/4 cup diced red onion

1/4 cup diced, celery

1/4 cup diced red bell pepper

1/4 cup diced oranges

1/4 cup diced jicama

2 cups Beef, chilled and diced

1 tablespoon chopped mint

1 tablespoon chopped cilantro

1/2 tablespoon lime juice

Cucumber Cups

2 each Euro-cucumber (seedless)

Sriracha Chili sauce for garnish

Combine all the ingredients in a mixing bowl and set aside. Cut ends off the cucumbers. Using a vegetable peeler, strip lines down the cucumber. Then cut 3/4 inch disks of cucumber. Lay the cucumber disks on a paper towel. With a melon baller, scoop a small bowl on one side of each cucumber disk.

Fill the cucumber cups and garnish with chili sauce.

Spiced Cinnamon Pecan Dip

1/2 pound butter, room temperature

2 cups pecans, toasted and warm

1 cup yogurt

1 cup sour cream

1 cup mayonnaise

1/2 cup honey

1 cup brown sugar

1/4 cup cinnamon

Combine all ingredients in a food processor. Dip your favorite fresh seasonal fruit and enjoy.



Spiced Cinnamon Pecan Dip