

on the table

entertain | cook | dish



SUMMER SOIREE

by tanya posavatz | photography by stacy sodolak

SUMMER IS FINALLY HERE and along with it the Texas heat. Throw a grown-up pool party to remind everyone of how fun summer can be! Channel the Hamptons, Caribbean or Mediterranean, or blend all three into a beach or water-themed party. For a cohesive look, work the theme into your invitation, menu, decor, music and even a take-home surprise for guests. Not your typical backyard barbecue—this is chic cocktails at dusk with a lake view. Now chill.



SETTING THE SCENE

THE INVITATION For a special touch, have a local stationer design a custom invitation. Flat printing is not expensive, and you don't have to worry about laying it out yourself, your printer running out of ink or jamming, or the invitation looking like a gradeschooler's art project.

THE LOOK Instead of using colorful linens or flowers, go for a crisp white look, and let blue and green glass vases placed throughout the venue act as pops of color and reminders of the ocean. Incorporate color in plates, glassware and votive holders to supplement the vases. For an outdoor lounge reminiscent of a Miami hotel, rent white linens to cover patio furniture and add blue and green throw pillows (you can also move some indoor furniture outside). As party favors for guests, give mini bottles of rum with a mojito recipe attached.

THE SOUND Buy a summer-themed compilation album (like Pottery Barn's *Summer Vibes*) or make your own. Your mix could include "Under the Boardwalk," "Soak up the Sun" and anything by The Beach Boys, Jimmy Buffet or Bob Marley.





COUNTDOWN

Four weeks Make your guest list; order invitations.

Three weeks Send invitations; start shopping for decor items.

One week Rent or buy glassware, tableware and linens; buy or make mix CDs.

One day Buy groceries, bar ingredients and cocktail napkins; prepare apple pie dough and refrigerate overnight.

Morning of Pick up flowers; arrange furniture; make pitchers of cocktails, and prepare tuna, wasabi and pesto, refrigerate overnight.

Three hours Make apple pies.

Two hours Chill wine, beer and sparkling water; make lobster tartlets, refrigerate.

One hour Fry and assemble wontons.

Half hour Stock bar.

10 minutes Set-out hors d'oeuvres; light candles, and start music.

After guests arrive Restock bar and food; arrange favors near exit, so guests can take one as they leave.



PARTY TIPS

GLASSWARE You'll need 50 glasses for 20 people, since some people will switch glasses during the party. Expect each guest to drink two drinks during the first hour of the party and one each hour thereafter. If you are serving specialty drinks (such as mojitos or gimlets), people will drink less wine and beer.

TABLEWARE If you put plates and flatware on each food station, plan on at least 30 plates for 20 people. Larger plates encourage guests to load up; smaller plates enforce portion control.

OUTSOURCE Be the hostess instead of the cook and clean-up crew—hire a caterer and rent from a party rental store. Determined to do the cooking yourself? Still consider hiring two party staff: one to help with setup, restocking the buffet and cleanup and one to tend bar (TABC certified).

WHAT TO POUR: MOJITO. For a Caribbean theme, this Cuban drink is the rage. Mix equal parts fresh lime juice, light rum (we prefer Bacardi) and simple syrup. Pour in glasses filled with ice and crushed fresh mint springs. (SIMPLE SYRUP: mix 2 parts water to 1 part sugar, bring to boil, cool).

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POOLSIDE FOOD 101



SEARED TUNA WONTONS WITH WASABI MOUSSE AND CILANTRO PESTO

Serves 20

Prep time-30 minutes

tuna

- 8 ounces sushi-grade ahi tuna
- 2 tablespoons sesame seeds
- Salt and pepper
- ½ inch oil

1. Coat tuna filet with sesame seeds, and salt and pepper to taste on both sides.
2. Sear in oil in smoking-hot cast iron skillet for 30 seconds on each side.
3. Set tuna in refrigerator to chill.

wasabi mousse

- ½ cup heavy cream
- 2 teaspoons wasabi powder
- 2 teaspoons seasoned rice vinegar

1. Whip cream until stiff peaks form.
2. Gently fold in wasabi and vinegar until combined. The amount of wasabi will vary by taste.
3. Recipe will mellow after resting in refrigerator for 30 minutes.

cilantro pesto

- ½ bunch cilantro
- ½ clove garlic



- 2 tablespoons parmesan cheese
- 1 tablespoon pine nuts
- Salad oil

1. Place cilantro, garlic, cheese and nuts in a food processor and blend.
2. Blend in just enough oil to form thick paste.
3. Set in refrigerator.

assemble

- 10 wonton wrappers
- ½ inch oil

1. Cut wontons into four small pieces, either triangles or squares, and fry in 350-degree oil. Drain on paper towels, then arrange on serving platter.
2. Cut the tuna into 1-inch strips, then slice into ¼-inch squares.
3. On each crispy wonton, place a dollop of wasabi mousse then a slice of tuna, and garnish with a dot of cilantro pesto.

STEAMED LOBSTER TARTLETS WITH WILD MUSHROOMS AND BEARNAISE AIOLI

Serves 20

Prep time-60 minutes

lobster

- 8 ounces lobster tail



1. Poach lobster in your favorite seafood boil. An 8-ounce lobster tail will take about 6 minutes.
2. Cool lobster in ice water, remove from shell and cut it into ¼-inch cubes.
3. Set lobster aside.

aioli

- 1 shallot
- ½ cup white wine
- 1 sprig tarragon, chopped
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- Salt and pepper

1. Dice shallot and place in small sauce pot with wine and tarragon. Simmer until reduced almost dry.
2. Add vinegar, simmer for a few moments longer, then remove from heat, and cool.
3. Combine shallot-tarragon reduction with mayonnaise, and season with salt and pepper.

assemble

- 8 ounces wild mushrooms
- 1 shallot
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons Pernod
- 20 prebaked one-inch tartlet shells (available at Central Market)
- 1 sprig tarragon

1. Wash and dice mushrooms.

2. Slice shallot and sauté in butter until soft. Add mushrooms and cook until tender.
3. Carefully, off the flame, add Pernod, then cook until alcohol evaporates, about 30 seconds.
4. Add lobster and cook until everything is warmed through.
5. Place lobster in mixing bowl, and add just enough aioli to coat. Spoon mixture into tart shells, and garnish with a tiny dollop of aioli and a tarragon leaf.

ACHIOTE CHICKEN

Serves 20

Prep time-45 minutes

- 4 ounces achiote paste
- 1 tablespoon water
- 3 cloves garlic
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- 2 tablespoons fresh oregano leaves
- 2 pounds chicken breast

1. Place all ingredients except chicken in food processor, and blend until smooth.
2. Slice chicken in thin strips and marinate in achiote mixture for 30 minutes.
3. Skewer chicken and grill over hot flame until done, about 2 minutes per side.

sauce

- 3 ripe mangoes
- ½ cup Thai sweet chile sauce
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- Water, as needed
- Salt and pepper

1. Peel and seed mangoes, and place in blender with chile sauce and soy sauce. Blend until smooth.
2. Add water to achieve a rich sauce consistency.
3. Serve as dipping sauce with achiote chicken satay.

HALF-MOON APPLE PIES WITH SOUR CREAM GLAZE

Serves 20

Prep time-60 minutes

dough

- ½ pound cream cheese
- 6 tablespoons butter
- 1 cup plus 6 tablespoons flour
- Pinch salt

1. Combine all ingredients in food processor, and mix until combined.
2. Turn dough out onto work surface, and knead gently 2 or 3 times by folding it in half, turning it 90 degrees, pressing it out flat and folding again.
3. Form dough into 1-inch thick rectangle, wrap in plastic and refrigerate for 1 hour or up to 4 days.

filling

- 2 Granny Smith apples
- ¼ cup butter
- ½ cup brown sugar
- Lemon juice
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon

1. Peel and dice apples smaller than ¼ inch, and sauté in butter for 1 or 2 minutes.
2. Add brown sugar and stir. Add just enough lemon juice to melt sugar into a smooth syrup.
3. Cook for 3 minutes more over low heat, stir in cinnamon and set aside to cool.

glaze

- 10 cups powdered sugar
- 1 tablespoon sour cream
- A few drops lemon juice

1. Mix everything together in small bowl, the powdered sugar one cup at a time. It will be very stiff at first but should loosen up. If it is still too thick to drizzle, add lemon juice, drop by drop.



assemble

- ¾ inch oil for frying
- Egg wash (1 egg beaten with 2 tablespoons water)

1. Roll dough out on floured surface to ⅛-inch thickness, and cut into 2½- or 3-inch circles, until no more dough remains.
2. Brush each circle around the edge lightly with egg wash.
3. Place one tablespoon filling in center, and close edges together into a half-moon shape. Crimp edges with fork.
4. Chill pies for 10 minutes in freezer, and then fry, two or three at a time, in 350-degree oil, turning once or twice to ensure even cooking. Drain on paper towels.
5. When they have cooled for 10 or 15 minutes, drizzle with glaze and allow to rest for another 10 minutes, while glaze hardens. Serve warm or at room temperature.

SAVE TIME—OR MONEY

- Use **frozen pie dough** for the apple pies, and bake them in the oven for 10 minutes at 350 degrees, instead of frying.

- Substitute **crabmeat for lobster** in the tartlets. Just gently warm the cleaned crabmeat with the mushrooms, then proceed with the assembly.

- **Don't search all day for specific ingredients:** We used morels and crimini mushrooms in the lobster tartlets, but use whatever is in season.



CHRISTOPHER LYTTLE OF CASTLE HILL CAFÉ

Salads of Summer

by rebecca robinson | photography by stacy sodolak

MOVE OVER ICEBERG—a new group of summer salads has just hit town. Bread, shrimp, microgreens and vermicelli are just a few new twists on classic salads for the lazy days of summer.

Splashes of color, exciting texture and bursts of flavor—these are key elements that Executive Chef Christopher Lyttle of Castle Hill Café uses to describe his vision of the new salad. Castle Hill, a longtime Austin institution for imaginative cuisine, is well-known for its tasty, inventive salads, fusing a medley of ethnic styles and flavors.

When asked to give a cooking lesson on fresh summer salads, Lyttle invented four unique recipes to premiere with *Austin Monthly Home* readers. The salads are designed with ease and convenience in mind. They are compartmentalized in order to be made ahead of time, then tossed together during a busy work week (or for a trip to the lake).

TIP for Buying Produce

- Look for deep, intense colors.
- Raw produce should be crisp and firm to touch.
- Buy organic—in addition to their health and environmental benefits, Lyttle prefers organics for better flavor. Pesticides, herbicides and chemical fertilizers strip important minerals when washed away, which affects the intensity of flavor.

BREAD SALAD WITH SWEET CORN-GINGER DRESSING

Prep time- 40 minutes

“Bread salads are not typically Asian, but increased Thai and Vietnamese influences in Texas have set the stage for some interesting food fusions. The bread salad is great for people on the go, as everything can be made well ahead of time and put together quickly at home or for a picnic-style lunch just about anywhere. For heartier appetites, the Asian pesto works very well with a variety of fish. Try grilling some salmon, flaking it apart with a fork and tossing it with the pesto and the croutons.”

— Chef Lyttle

sesame croutons

Makes 2 quarts

- 1 French baguette, cut into even ½-inch dice
 - ½ cup vegetable oil
 - 1 teaspoon sesame oil
 - 1 tablespoon soy sauce
 - 2 tablespoons lime juice
1. Combine vegetable oil and sesame oil in a blender and, with the motor running, add soy sauce and lime juice.
 2. Very lightly toss the cubed bread in the oil mixture and spread on a baking sheet.
 3. Bake at 350 degrees until crispy (about 10 minutes). Allow to cool completely, and store

in airtight container.

sweet corn-ginger dressing

Makes 2 cups

- 3 ears yellow sweet corn, grilled or steamed, cut from cob
 - 1 inch fresh ginger root, peeled and minced
 - 3 tablespoons rice wine vinegar
 - 1 tablespoon sugar
 - 2 tablespoons roasted garlic
 - 1 cup mayonnaise
 - Salt and pepper
1. Combine all ingredients in food processor or blender, and pulse to emulsify.

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2. Adjust seasoning with salt and pepper, and strain to remove corn and ginger pulp.
3. Use immediately or refrigerate.

Asian pesto

Makes 1 cup

- 1 cup fresh basil, packed
- ½ cup fresh cilantro, packed
- ½ cup fresh mint, packed
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- ½ inch fresh ginger, peeled and minced
- 3 tablespoons blanched almonds
- ¼ teaspoon sesame oil
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 2 tablespoons rice wine vinegar
- Pinch of crushed red pepper flakes
- Vegetable oil as needed

1. Place all ingredients except oil in food

TIPS for Salad Preparation and Storage

- Buy produce in small quantities.
- Always rinse lettuce and other produce—even “prewashed” and bagged produce.
- Very cold water reinvigorates lettuce and other leafy greens.
- Salad spin or towel dry produce after washing.
- Store produce in a sealed plastic bag—poke holes so that air can circulate through.
- Place a damp paper towel in the plastic bag with produce—the towel will absorb excess moisture while keeping produce fresh.

processor, and pulse to combine. With motor running, slowly add vegetable oil until mixture forms a thick but fluid pesto.

2. Refrigerate until needed.

tomato relish

Makes 2 cups

- 3 Roma tomatoes, diced
- 1 ear sweet yellow corn, grilled or steamed, cut from cob
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- ½ cup purple cabbage, shredded
- 1 green onion, sliced fine
- 2 tablespoons rice wine vinegar
- Vegetable oil, just to coat

1. Combine all in a large bowl and toss.
2. Refrigerate until needed.

assemble

Serves 1

- ¾ cup baby spinach, packed
- ½ cup Napa cabbage, shredded
- 3 ounces sweet corn-ginger dressing
- ¾ cup sesame croutons
- 3 tablespoons Asian pesto
- ½ cup tomato relish

1. Toss baby spinach and Napa cabbage with sweet corn-ginger dressing.
2. Toss sesame croutons with Asian pesto.
3. Place greens on chilled plate and top with croutons and tomato relish.

NICOISE SALAD WITH SEARED TUNA

Prep time- 30 minutes

dressing

Makes 3 cups

- ½ cup red wine vinegar
- ½ cup minced shallots, washed in cold water
- 4 teaspoons dijon mustard
- 2 cloves garlic, processed into paste with 1 teaspoon salt
- 3 ounces anchovies, with oil

TIP for Buying Fresh Tuna

- Color is key. The more vibrant the red coloring, the higher the grade.
- Tell your fishmonger to remove the bloodline and connective tissue, then inspect your tuna.
- Make sure that your tuna has a saltwater odor, not fishy.



- 2 cups extra virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon fresh thyme, minced
- 1 tablespoon fresh basil, minced
- Salt and pepper, to taste

1. Whisk together vinegar, shallots, mustard, garlic paste and anchovies in medium bowl until well combined.
2. Add oil in slow stream while whisking until emulsified. Whisk in thyme, basil and salt and pepper to taste.

salad

- 1½ pounds green beans, trimmed and cut
- 1 pound sushi-grade tuna
- Salt, garlic and pepper

1. Blanch green beans, and cool in ice bath. Set aside.
2. Coat outside of tuna with preferred amount salt, garlic granules and black pepper. Sear until just colored (keep the inside rare). Set aside.

assemble

Serves 4

- 2 tablespoons capers, drained
- 1 cup mixed nicoise, black and Spanish green olives
- 2 hard-boiled eggs, yolks and whites separated, passed through a fine sieve
- 3 tablespoons parsley, minced
- Yellow bell pepper, fine julienne, as needed for garnish

1. Just before serving, combine all ingredients except tuna and toss with dressing.
2. Slice tuna, arrange salad in middle of a serving platter and shingle tuna slices atop salad. Garnish with yellow pepper strips and dressing.

ROASTED PORTABELLA SALAD

Prep time- 4 hours with oven-dried tomatoes, 1 hour without

“Mushrooms are a great source of flavor and can be adapted to a number of cooking styles. One factor many cooks overlook, however, is the moisture content of mushrooms. They are mostly water, and special attention should be paid to technique, ensuring that the most flavor possible is brought out. Sauté techniques are great for this but shouldn’t be done too far ahead of serving. The roasting technique in this recipe also works to concentrate the flavor of the mushrooms, and it is a lot easier to do.”

— Chef Lyttle

mushrooms

Makes 1 quart

- ¾ cup whole grain mustard
- ½ cup balsamic vinegar
- ½ cup cider vinegar
- ¼ cup mixed herbs (fresh rosemary, oregano, and cilantro)
- 2 tablespoons garlic, minced
- 1½ teaspoons chipotle powder
- 1 tablespoon smoked paprika
- ¼ cup honey



- 1 cup tomato juice
- ½ cup vegetable oil
- ½ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 tablespoon black pepper

1. Combine all ingredients except for oils in blender, and pulse to fully combine.
2. With machine still running, slowly add oils to form emulsion.
3. Coat portabella mushrooms (dark gills removed) in marinade, and allow to sit at least 30 minutes.
4. Remove mushrooms from marinade and shake off excess.
5. Place gill-side up on rack over baking pan, roasting in 350-degree oven for 10 minutes, or until mushrooms begin to look dry.
6. Remove from oven, and allow to cool slightly before slicing into strips. Store in refrigerator for later use, or serve warm immediately with remaining salad ingredients.

oven-dried tomatoes

Makes 1 quart

“You can substitute sun-dried tomatoes, but I think these are more flavorful.”

— Chef Lyttle

- 2 Roma tomatoes, stems removed and sliced lengthwise into 6 wedges each
- 1 teaspoon extra virgin olive oil
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon black pepper, small grind
- 1 tablespoon Italian flat leaf parsley, minced

1. Combine all ingredients in medium

bowl, and toss to coat tomatoes.

2. Arrange on rack over baking pan, and dehydrate in oven set on low (175-200 degrees) for 3 hours, or until tomatoes are dry to the touch.
3. Don’t forget about them—if you leave them in the oven too long, they can burn.
4. Remove skins, and set aside.

avocado lime vinaigrette

Makes 1 cup

- 1 ripe avocado, pitted and peeled
- juice of 2 limes
- 1 shallot, minced and rinsed in cold water
- 1 tablespoon cilantro, minced
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper, to taste

1. Combine all ingredients except for oil in food processor or blender, and pulse to liquefy and combine.
2. With motor running, slowly add oil until emulsified. Adjust seasoning with salt and pepper.

assemble

Serves 4

- 4 tostadas
- 4 roasted portabella mushrooms, sliced and warmed in oven if desired
- 4 handfuls mixed salad greens
- 8 ounces avocado lime vinaigrette
- 12 oven-dried tomato strips
- 1 cucumber, peeled, seeded and sliced into ¼-inch thick “crescent moons”
- 4 ounces queso blanco (can substitute jack cheese), grated

1. Toss greens and cucumbers with avocado vinaigrette, and place on tostadas set on medium-rimmed plates.
2. Arrange mushrooms and oven-dried tomatoes on top of greens and sprinkle grated queso blanco over all.