

FESTIVE FLAVOURS

Keeping Them Healthy

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Holidays are here and this year it's your turn to have a party celebration for your family and friends. But don't worry; you can do it. Just plan ahead; have a clear vision about the food you will serve, and how the house will be decorated.

You can do something special and different for the holiday season, especially when hosting a party. This year I invite you to choose something very unique. Surprise your family and friends with amazing healthy festive

flavours that look appealing and taste absolutely delicious.

Before you start making your own healthy, homemade desserts, I suggest you go through your kitchen cupboards with a plan to gradually replace any processed foods with healthier options. With a feeling of liberation, you can remove refined processed oils, margarine, chemically preserved condiments, overly processed foods containing monosodium glutamate (MSG), listed also as "natural

flavours", and "vegetable protein". If you are really committed to health, you can also remove any foods with saturated fat (dairy products and red meat), sugar-filled jams and jellies, artificial sweeteners, and packaged bread with preservatives.

Clean your cupboards and refrigerator and start adding foods that are real, organic, and fresh with no additives and chemicals. Do it gradually, and bring some excitement to the process.

DAILY ESSENTIALS

TO MAKE DELICIOUS, NUTRITIOUS, CUSTOMIZED TREATS

1. Go Nuts: Almonds are my favourite and I use them in many of my recipes. I create a crust by using nuts and seeds, along with dates, raisins or dried fruits. For a sweeter taste I add maple syrup or agave nectar. I also use pine nuts, walnuts, pistachios, and macadamia nuts for my patés. Nuts are a source of protein, fibre and good fat. Buy fresh nuts and seeds as much as possible, preferably from a busy store. Store them in the refrigerator in a glass container to prevent them from going rancid.

2. Vegetable and Fruitful Delights: Try a variety of greens; buy organic, fresh and local if possible. Have on hand arugula, romaine lettuce, kale, dandelion greens, watercress, parsley, endive, cucumbers, celery and spinach. You can make a colourful party salad, arugula or parsley patés, romaine lettuce wraps, or dips. They are full of vitamins and extremely healthy for you. Decorate your festive plate with sliced cucumbers; add parsley paté and place half of a cherry tomato on top. Sprinkle onion sprouts on cucumbers to get more texture and color. Make your own tasty guacamole with avocado, tomatoes, onions, olives, and serve it with organic tortillas. Pesto and humus go very well with dehydrated crackers, ribs of celery and a bowl of olives. Use fresh papaya, mango and figs together in a bowl for sweet temptation. My desserts are usually made of seasonal fruits, strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, apples, bananas and pears. Store all greens in the fridge loosely wrapped.

3. Sea Vegetables: A popular sea vegetable, Dulse, is also my favourite. Dried Dulse flakes are rich in protein, vitamins and minerals, and are delicious on salads. It can also be used as a salt substitute. Other very popular types are Wakame, Arame, Hijiki, and Nori. Dulse can be used in wraps and sushi dishes. Create your own sushi roll-ups stuffed with tomatoes, peppers and sunflower sprouts.

4. Smell the Coconut: Coconut oil or

coconut butter contains medium chain fatty acids, and is used as an immediate source of fuel and energy. It digests better and is not stored in the body as fat reserves. Coconut butter has anti-bacterial and anti-viral properties and is also very good for the immune system. I mix coconut oil in smoothies and desserts.

5. Celtic Sea Salt: This is a complex and balanced mixture of the essential minerals our body needs and craves. Add a pinch of sea salt to both sweet and savoury dishes. I use Celtic sea salt in my desserts to bring out flavours. I sprinkle salt over salads, and also add it to my homemade dips and patés.

6. Spice Up Your Life: Cinnamon, ginger, turmeric, basil, lemon cumin, parsley, watercress, garlic, and green onions are all flavourful in dressings, patés, and shakes. They have healing properties and I enjoy them every day.

7. How Sweet It Is: I use dates in my recipes to add sweetness. You can also use raisins or currants. Raw agave nectar is another natural sweetener that I use in shakes, cakes, and creamy desserts. Raw agave nectar has a low glycemic index, and is therefore very good for those with blood sugar problems.

8. Addicted To Chocolate: Chocolate or cacao is not processed, roasted or mixed with milk solids. It has a distinctive bitter-sweet flavour and is delicious in cakes and smoothies. Raw cacao can be a substitute for a carob powder or it can also be used together in recipes. Carob is the seed pod of an evergreen tree. Carob powder is a sweet fruit that is ground into a powder. I use carob powder in my chocolate recipes and shakes. I add raw cacao to my homemade almond milk with a pinch of Celtic sea salt, cinnamon and agave nectar. It tastes delicious.

9. Refreshing Drinks: Think about colour and texture when mixing cooling drinks.

Make a refreshing Piña Colada drink made of real coconuts and fresh pineapple for when guests arrive.

Organic Wines: Serve organic wines that are made from certified organic grapes with no sulphites added. Do not buy organic wines from the wineries that use organic grapes, but add sulphites and other additives. Watch for the label "Made with organically grown grapes".

Sulphites are powerful preservatives added to wine as a protection against oxidation and bacterial growth (spoilage). Some people are allergic to sulphites as they cause headaches and other allergic reactions.

Choose Cabernet Sauvignon with cherry, blackberry and currant flavours to serve with chocolate cake or other chocolate desserts. It also goes well with vegetables.

Zinfandel with a distinctive raspberry flavour goes very well with tomato dishes and dips, and Sauvignon Blanc with its tropical fruity flavours is excellent with goat cheese rolled in arugula leaf (for those who eat goat cheese).

Be creative! Play with healthy foods. You, your family and your friends will be surprised with the results. Happy Holidays to you and your family.

