

“Probably the reason we all go so haywire at Christmas time with the endless unrestrained and often silly buying of gifts is that we don’t quite know how to put our love into words.”

— HARLAN MILLER



BITE by BITE

Conquering My Culinary Bucket List One Dish at a Time

By Emily Banks Wooten

“Christmas always rustled. It rustled every time, mysteriously, with silver and gold paper, tissue paper and a rich abundance of shiny paper, decorating and hiding everything and giving a feeling of reckless extravagance.”

— TOVE JANSSON

Snacks to pair with cocktails

Blue Cheese & Dried Cherry Oatmeal Cookies

From Better Homes & Gardens Christmas Cookies 2021

- 1½ cups all purpose flour
- ½ cup oat flour (see tip below)
- ½ teaspoon dried thyme, crushed
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¾ cup cold butter, cut up
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- ½ cup coarsely chopped dried cherries
- ½ cup crumbled blue cheese
- ½ cup finely chopped toasted walnuts

- In a large bowl stir together flours, thyme and salt. Using a pastry blender, cut butter into flour mixture until mixture resembles fine crumbs and starts to cling. Stir in egg. Add cherries and blue cheese. Knead gently until mixture forms a ball. Divide dough in half.
- Roll dough into two 7-inch logs. Roll logs in chopped walnuts. Wrap each log in plastic wrap and refrigerate at least 2 hours or up to 2 days. (see tip below)
- Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Unwrap and slice each log into ¾-inch slices. Arrange slices 1 inch apart on parchment-lined cookie sheets. Bake 20 minutes or until just slightly browned and set. Cool on cookie sheets 5 minutes. Cool completely on a wire rack.
- To store: Place cookies in an airtight container. Store in the refrigerator up to 4 days or freeze up to 2 months.
- Oat flour: Make oat flour by processing rolled oats in a blender or food processor until a fine powder.
- Freeze for later: Dough logs can be frozen up to 3 months. If freezing, place wrapped logs in a resealable freezer bag. Thaw about 10 minutes or until soft enough to cut without crumbling. Bake as directed, adding 1 to 2 minutes to baking time.

My notes:

- I used finely chopped pecans instead of walnuts and I didn’t toast them.
- I don’t have a pastry blender so I used a box grater to grate the cold butter and this worked nicely.

“Freshly cut Christmas trees smelling of stars and snow and pine resin—inhale deeply and fill your soul with wintry night.”

— JOHN J. GEDDES

Cranberry-Brie Bites

By Carolyn Casner
From eatingwell.com

- 1 (7-8 oz.) prepared pie crust
- ½ cup prepared cranberry sauce or homemade
- 3 oz. Brie cheese, cut into 24 pieces, divided
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh chives (Optional)

- Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Lightly coat a mini muffin tin with cooking spray.
- Unroll pie crust onto a cutting board or clean surface. Flatten dough to about 12 inches in diameter. Cut 24 2-inch circles out of the dough with a biscuit cutter, rerolling scraps if needed. Place the dough circles in the muffin tin cups, gently pressing on the bottom and sides. Prick the dough with a fork. Bake until lightly browned, 5 to 7 minutes. Remove from the oven.
- Add 1 teaspoon cranberry sauce to each cup, then top with a piece of Brie. Return to the oven and bake until the sauce is hot and the cheese has melted, about 5 minutes more. Let cool for 10 minutes. Sprinkle with chives, if desired, and serve warm.

Aunt Midget’s Cheese Cookies

By Midge Boothe

- 1 stick butter
- 8 oz. grated cheddar cheese
- 1¼ cup sifted flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 cup finely chopped pecans

- Combine all of the above ingredients, shape into a long roll, wrap in waxed paper and chill in the refrigerator. When well-chilled, slice and bake at 425 degrees for 10 minutes.

From about Halloween to New Year’s Eve we seem to get invited to a number of social events, be it tailgates, holiday-related open houses or just good old-fashioned happy hours. It’s always nice to take something to add to the spread rather than show up empty-handed. I don’t particularly care to eat anything sweet if I’m drinking alcohol. It’s just too much in my opinion. I’d much prefer something on the savory side. So I decided to cobble together a few ideas for savory cookies and snacks that pair well with cocktails.

The first one, tried and true, has been in the family for many, many years. Originally shared with us by one of my maternal grandmother’s sisters, my great aunt Midge Boothe, it’s long been a family favorite. Contrary to the name—“Cheese Cookies”—there’s nothing sweet about them. Featuring cheddar cheese, cayenne pepper and chopped pecans among other things, they’re really more of a cracker, I’d say. Funny enough, having shared the recipe with a good friend years ago who then shared it with her mother, they began calling them “Scotch cookies” because my friend’s mother so enjoyed having a few in the evenings with her glass of Scotch.

Not too long ago when I was perusing the newest issue of Better Homes & Gardens’ Christmas Cookies in preparation for the annual Christmas Cook-

ie Exchange in which I participate, I ran across a picture in the “savory cookie” section called “Blue Cheese & Dried Cherry Oatmeal Cookies” that not only was beautiful, but really intrigued me with the various ingredients.

And then a few days later an email from Eating Well Magazine showed up in my inbox titled “Easy 3-Ingredient Appetizers.” Hmmmm. There were 13 from which to choose but I decided to try out the “Cranberry-Brie Bites.”

“Aunt Midget’s Cheese Cookies” are always good and I really liked the “Blue Cheese & Dried Cherry Oatmeal Cookies.” However, to be honest, I was a little underwhelmed by the “Cranberry-Brie Bites.” Oh well, I guess we can’t hit it out of the park every time. ■

