5 Easy Holiday Recipe Ideas

When we’re having people over, I want food I can put on the table and let everyone dig in. I’d start with the charcuterie board, bring out the cranberry feta pasta salad, and pick one of the three mains for dinner. If I’m in the mood for pasta, it’s cheesy baked spaghetti or a big bowl of spaghetti Bolognese. For a cozy casserole, I’d go with shepherd’s pie.

How to Make a $20 Fall Charcuterie Board Look Expensive

This is what I put out when people are coming over and I still have dinner in the oven. The figs and strawberries give it color, and the pickles add a little tang with the salami. Aim for around $20 and use any crackers, pickles, or olives you already have. This board serves about four as an appetizer.



Ingredients

- 1 block cheddar or Gouda, sliced
- 1 small package sliced salami
- 1 handful strawberries
- 3–4 fresh figs, halved
- 1 small handful green olives
- 4–5 mini pickles or cornichons
- Rustic crackers or crispbread
- A few sprigs of fresh rosemary

How to Make It

1. Start with the cheese, strawberries, and figs. Place them in little groups around a board or large plate.

2. Fold or overlap the salami and tuck it between the fruit and cheese.

3. Fill the gaps with olives and mini pickles. Add the crackers along the edge and tuck in a few sprigs of rosemary.

Cranberry Feta Pasta Salad

This is the side I'd bring to a holiday potluck. It's sweet, tangy, and a little crunchy, and you can toss it all in the bowl you're taking with you. The honey balsamic dressing is especially good with the salty feta. Serves 4–6.



Salad

- 8 oz pasta, such as penne, bow ties, or rotini
- 3 cups baby spinach, roughly chopped
- ½ cup dried cranberries
- ½ cup crumbled feta
- ¼ cup chopped walnuts

Honey Balsamic Dressing

- 3 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 1 tbsp honey
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp black pepper
- ½ tsp garlic powder, optional

How to Make It

1. Cook the pasta according to the package directions. Drain it well and let it cool so the spinach stays fresh.

2. Whisk the olive oil, balsamic vinegar, honey, Dijon, salt, pepper, and garlic powder, if using.

3. Toss the cooled pasta with the spinach, cranberries, feta, and walnuts. Pour over the dressing and toss again.

Cheesy Baked Spaghetti

If you want a holiday dinner everyone can scoop straight from the pan, make this. It has a beefy marinara, a creamy ricotta and cottage cheese layer, and bubbly cheese on top. Spaghetti works here, and so does any short pasta you have in the pantry.



Ingredients

- 8 oz Pastabilities spaghetti or short pasta
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- ½ cup chopped onion
- 1 clove garlic, chopped
- 1 bell pepper, chopped
- 1 lb Laura's Lean 96% lean, 4% fat ground beef
- Salt and black pepper, to taste
- 16 oz marinara sauce
- ½ cup chopped fresh basil
- 1 tsp sugar
- ½ cup chopped fresh parsley, plus more to serve if you like
- 1 cup cottage cheese
- 1 cup ricotta
- 2 cups shredded mozzarella, cheddar, or a blend, divided
- 1 cup grated Parmesan, divided

How to Make It

1. Preheat the oven to 375°F (190°C). Cook the pasta in salted water until al dente, then drain.

2. Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Sauté the onion and bell pepper until they start to soften. Stir in the garlic, then add the beef and break it up with a spoon. Season with salt and pepper and cook the beef through.

3. Stir the marinara, basil, and sugar into the beef and simmer for about 5 minutes. Taste and adjust the seasoning, then toss with the cooked pasta.

4. Mix the parsley, cottage cheese, ricotta, 1 cup of the shredded cheese, and ½ cup of the Parmesan in a bowl.

5. Spread half the meat-sauce pasta in a baking dish. Spoon the ricotta mixture over it, then add the remaining pasta. Finish with the remaining 1 cup shredded cheese and ½ cup Parmesan.

6. Bake for 20–25 minutes, until the cheese is melted and bubbly and the edges are golden. Let it rest a few minutes and add more parsley if you like.

Ground Beef Shepherd’s Pie

This is the casserole I’d make for a cozy night with family. There’s savory ground beef with carrots and peas under the mashed potatoes, and I like to add cheddar so the top gets golden. I use boxed mashed potatoes to keep the prep simple. Since this version uses beef, it’s also called cottage pie.



Beef Filling

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 cup chopped onion
- ½ cup chopped carrots
- 1 lb Laura’s Lean 92% lean, 8% fat ground beef
- 1½ tsp salt
- ½ tsp black pepper
- 2 tbsp all-purpose flour
- ½ cup dry red wine, such as Cabernet Sauvignon or a red blend
- ½ cup beef broth
- 3 tbsp coconut aminos
- ½ cup frozen peas
- ½ cup shredded cheddar and chopped parsley, optional toppings

Mashed Potato Topping

- ⅔ cup water
- ¼ tsp salt
- 1 tbsp butter
- ⅓ cup cold milk
- ⅔ cup instant mashed potato flakes

How to Make It

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F (200°C). Heat the olive oil in a skillet over medium heat. Cook the onion and carrots until they start to soften. Add the beef, salt, and pepper. Break up the meat and cook it through.

2. Stir in the flour and cook for about 1 minute. Add the wine and scrape up the browned bits, then stir in the broth and coconut aminos. Simmer until the filling thickens, then stir in the frozen peas.

3. Bring the water, salt, and butter to a boil. Remove from the heat, add the cold milk, and gently stir in the potato flakes until moistened.

4. Spoon the beef filling into a small baking dish. Spread the mashed potatoes over the top and add cheddar if using. Bake for 20 minutes, until the filling is bubbling at the edges and the topping is golden. Finish with parsley if you like.

Spaghetti Bolognese

If I’m making pasta for Christmas dinner, I’m putting a big bowl of this in the middle of the table. The sauce has ground beef, carrots, celery, and a splash of cream. I finish it with Parmesan and fresh basil and let everyone help themselves.



Ingredients

- ½ cup chopped onion
- ½ cup chopped carrots
- ½ cup chopped celery
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 lb ground beef
- Salt and black pepper, to taste
- 1 tbsp sugar
- 1 tsp ground nutmeg
- ½ cup dry white wine
- 1 (15 oz) can tomato sauce
- ½ (6 oz) can tomato paste (3 oz)
- ¼ cup heavy cream
- Spaghetti or your favorite pasta, for serving
- Grated Parmesan and fresh basil, for serving

How to Make It

1. Heat a large skillet over medium heat. Sauté the onion, carrots, and celery until they begin to soften, adding a little olive oil if needed. Stir in the garlic for about 30 seconds.

2. Add the ground beef, breaking it up with a spoon. Season with salt, pepper, sugar, and nutmeg. Cook until the beef is browned and cooked through.

3. Pour in the white wine and scrape up any browned bits. Let it simmer for a couple of minutes, then stir in the tomato sauce and tomato paste. Reduce the heat to low and simmer gently for 20–30 minutes, stirring occasionally.

4. Cook the pasta according to the package. Stir the cream into the sauce near the end of cooking and taste for seasoning. Spoon the Bolognese over the pasta and finish with Parmesan and fresh basil.