

Impress guests with restaurant-quality appetizer



Salt Crust Scallops With Thai Lime Dipping Sauce

by Metro Creative Connection

Hosting for the holidays comes with many responsibilities. One of the biggest such responsibilities is feeding guests. While turkey may be the go-to entrée at the holiday dinner table, hosts have a little more leeway with regard to appetizers and snacks served before the meal.

What constitutes the right appetizers or snacks typically depends on the atmosphere of your holiday celebration. Standard snacks like potato chips or cookies are well suited to casual affairs, while more formal holiday dinners may require hosts go the extra mile with regard to appetizers. Hosts who want to wow their guests with a restaurant-worthy appetizer can consider the following recipe for "Salt Crust Scallops With Thai Lime Dipping Sauce" courtesy of Mark Bitterman's "Salt Block Cooking" (Andrews McMeel).

Salt Crust Scallops With Thai Lime Dipping Sauce

Makes 4 servings

- 1 9- to 10-inch square salt block
- 1/4 cup fresh lime juice
- 1/4 cup Thai fish sauce
- 1 tablespoon rice wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons toasted sesame oil
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 1 hot chile pepper, such as bird chile, habanero, cayenne or Scotch bonnet, stem and seeds removed, minced
- 1/4 cup finely shredded carrot
- 1 1/4 pounds large wild-caught sea scallops (about 16)
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Place the salt block over low heat on a gas grill or stovetop for 10 minutes. Turn the heat to medium and heat for 10 more minutes. Raise the heat to medium-high and heat the block to about 600 F, about 20 more minutes.

To make the dipping sauce, mix the lime juice, fish sauce, 1/4 cup water, vinegar, sesame oil, garlic, chile pepper, and carrot; set aside.

Pat the scallops dry and pull off their white gristly tendons if not already removed. Season the scallops with the black pepper and let stand at room temperature until the salt block is hot.

When the salt block is very hot (you should only be able to hold your hand above it for just a few seconds), place the scallops on the hot block and sear until browned and springy to the touch but still a little soft in the center, about 3 minutes per side. Work in batches if your salt block cannot comfortably fit all the scallops at once.

Transfer to a platter or plates and serve with the dipping sauce.

Did you know?



by Metro Creative Connection

Leaving cookies and milk for Santa Claus is a Christmas Eve tradition. Children regularly place a dish of cookies and a glass of milk by the tree on Christmas Eve so that Santa has enough energy to complete all of his gift-giving before kids wake up on Christmas morning. The tradition of leaving cookies out on Christmas Eve may trace its origins to Saint Nicholas. On the feast of St. Nicholas on December 6, children would leave food and drink for the saint and any attendants. The treats would be exchanged for gifts. While that's one theory behind the tradition, others think it is linked to the history of the Christmas tree and the edible decorations that adorn it. Santa would snack on the ornaments. Even after edible decorations gave way to inedible ornaments, the tradition of leaving a snack for Santa remained. Whatever the origins behind the tradition, millions of children dutifully leave milk and cookies for Santa on Christmas Eve.

Holiday travel tips



The right tablet and smartphone apps can make holiday travel a lot less hectic.

by Metro Creative Connection

The holiday season is rife with tradition, and traveling to visit family and friends is a tradition shared by many people. Holiday travel can be hectic, as millions of people take to the airways, highways and railroads in the days before and after Christmas.

But travelers whose patience is annually tried by airport security checkpoints and holiday traffic jams can employ several strategies to make holiday travel more palatable.

- Let apps do your leg-work. Technology has made life easier in many ways, and smartphone apps can even help travelers make holiday travel less stressful. A free app such as FlightView provides smartphone and tablet users with real-time flight information and even provides travelers with flight status alerts. Travelers or men and women trusted with picking up family and friends at the airport can check gate assignments, delays and cancellations and even follow the flight's progress while it's in the air.

And it's not just air travelers who can put their apps to work for them. Drivers who are on a budget can download the free GasBuddy app, which finds the cheapest gas in a given city or postal code. Traveling apps are quite popular, and many are free, saving travelers money while making holiday travel that much easier.

- Bring along your own sustenance. Hunger pangs are sure to arise during your holiday travels. Airports and roadside truck stops are not exactly known for their healthy fare, so pack your own nourishing foods that can help you maintain your energy and stay healthy. Packing your own meals and snacks also saves you money and, if you're driving, time.

- Ship gifts. Shipping holiday gifts is another way to simplify holiday travel and save money. The lighter air travelers can pack, the more quickly they can make it through the airport.

Shipping gifts saves you from paying excessive bag fees, and it also saves you the trouble of checking bags and waiting in baggage claim. Drivers also may benefit from shipping gifts, which can give everyone in the car more room to relax and also save the driver some money on gas.

- Switch up your travel schedule. If possible, take an extra day or two off during the holidays so you aren't forced to travel on the busiest travel days, which tend to be the days that immediately precede and follow the major holidays. If you must travel on busy holidays, hit the road or the friendly skies as early as possible. Book an early morning flight so you beat the crowds at security checkpoints or begin your drive an hour or so before sunrise when many of your fellow travelers are still asleep.

Travel is a holiday tradition for many people. While airports and highways are especially congested during the holiday season, there are many ways for travelers to make their trips less hectic this year.

Merry CHRISTMAS and HAPPY NEW YEAR

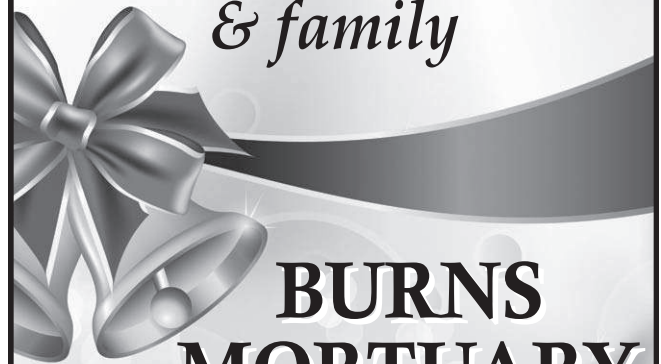
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