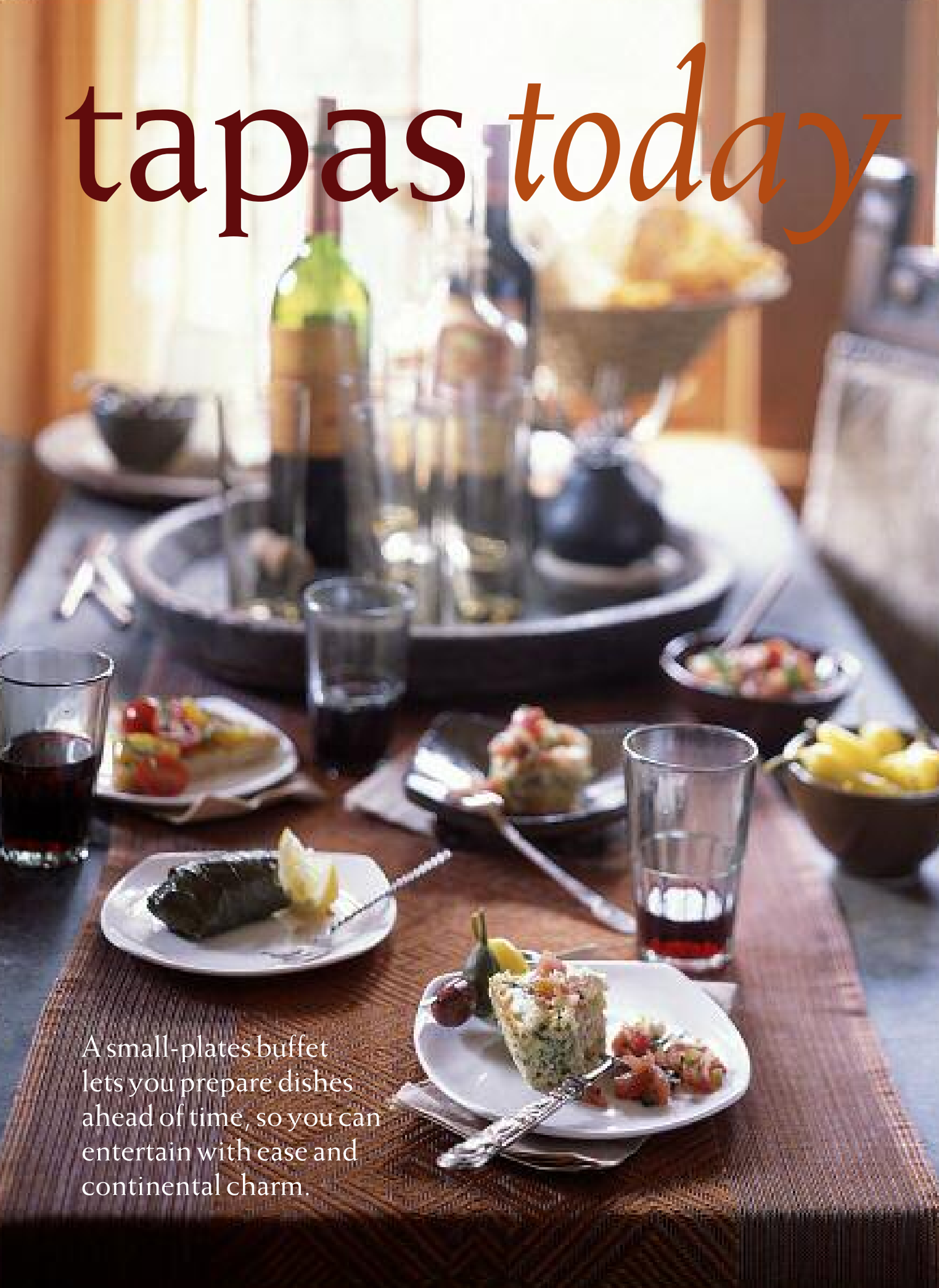


tapas *today*



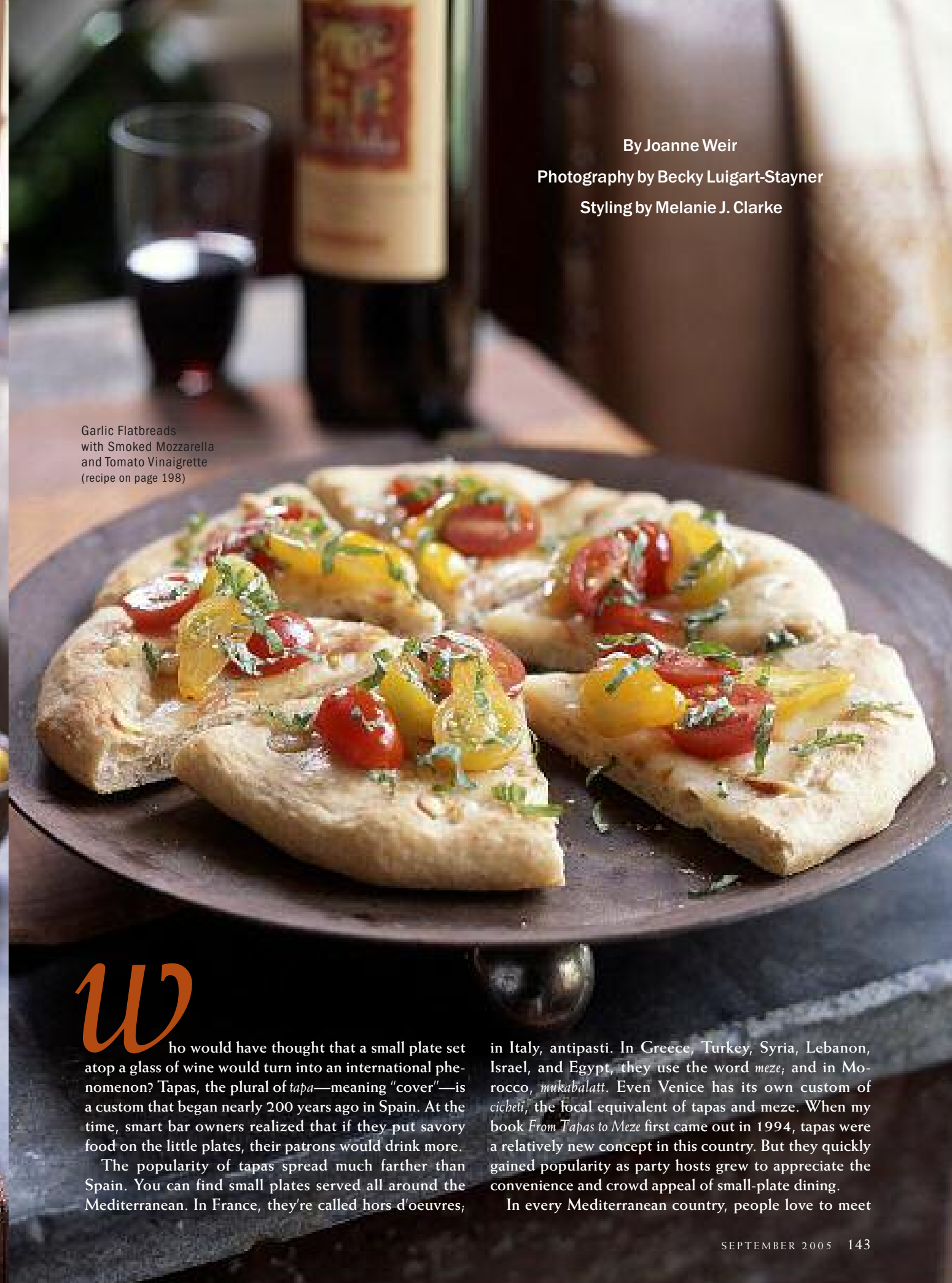
A small-plates buffet lets you prepare dishes ahead of time, so you can entertain with ease and continental charm.

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Styling by Melanie J. Clarke

Garlic Flatbreads with Smoked Mozzarella and Tomato Vinaigrette (recipe on page 198)



W

ho would have thought that a small plate set atop a glass of wine would turn into an international phenomenon? Tapas, the plural of *tapa*—meaning “cover”—is a custom that began nearly 200 years ago in Spain. At the time, smart bar owners realized that if they put savory food on the little plates, their patrons would drink more.

The popularity of tapas spread much farther than Spain. You can find small plates served all around the Mediterranean. In France, they’re called hors d’oeuvres;

in Italy, antipasti. In Greece, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Egypt, they use the word *meze*; and in Morocco, *mukabalatt*. Even Venice has its own custom of *cicheti*, the local equivalent of tapas and meze. When my book *From Tapas to Meze* first came out in 1994, tapas were a relatively new concept in this country. But they quickly gained popularity as party hosts grew to appreciate the convenience and crowd appeal of small-plate dining.

In every Mediterranean country, people love to meet



◀ Baked Omelet with Zucchini, Leeks, Feta, and Herbs

This classic Greek dish can be prepared several hours in advance and brought to room temperature before serving. A spoonful of the Smoky Tomato Relish (page 200) makes a suitable condiment.

- ¾ cup water
- ¼ cup uncooked long-grain rice
- Cooking spray
- 2¼ cups thinly sliced leek (about 3 medium)
- 4 cups shredded zucchini (about 2 medium)
- ½ cup egg substitute
- 1½ tablespoons chopped fresh mint
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh dill
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 4 large eggs, lightly beaten
- ½ cup (2 ounces) crumbled feta cheese

1. Bring water to a boil in a medium saucepan; add rice. Cover, reduce heat, and simmer 20 minutes or until liquid is absorbed. Place rice in a large bowl.
2. Preheat oven to 325°.

3. Heat a large nonstick skillet over medium-low heat. Coat pan with cooking spray. Add leek; cover and cook 12 minutes or until tender, stirring occasionally. Remove from pan; add leek to rice. Coat pan with cooking spray; increase heat to medium. Add zucchini; cook 6 minutes or until tender, stirring occasionally. Remove from pan; add zucchini to rice. Add egg substitute and next 5 ingredients (through eggs) to rice mixture; stir until blended.
4. Pour egg mixture into an 8-inch square baking dish coated with cooking spray. Sprinkle with cheese. Bake at 325° for 35 minutes or until golden brown and set. Yield: 16 servings (serving size: 1 piece).

CALORIES 60 (35% from fat); FAT 2.3g (sat 0.9g, mono 0.6g, poly 0.4g); PROTEIN 3.9g; CARB 6.4g; FIBER 0.8g; CHOL 54mg; IRON 1mg; SODIUM 154mg; CALC 42mg

with friends after work for a drink and to unwind, but they wouldn't think of imbibing without having a bite to eat. Small plates of food provide light yet satisfying accompaniments to the local drink, be it wine, sherry, pastis, prosecco, ouzo, or raki. Little nibbles stave off hunger, whet the appetite, and bring immediate gratification. This civilized custom allows people time to sit back, relax, and forget the stresses of daily life.

What started as a simple cover has developed into a dizzying array of flavorful, healthful, and colorful dishes. The variety can be staggering, which makes tapas ideal for entertaining at home. And don't think that everything has to come straight from the oven or frying pan at the last moment. Some dishes can be made in advance and reheated before serving. Even better, tapas are often served at room temperature, to be consumed at leisure. So relax, join your guests, and enjoy the Mediterranean charm of tapas.

When More Is More

Variety accounts for much of the fun of a tapas party. Because portions are small, guests can enjoy a wide selection of dishes. Ideally, your spread will include meats, fish, cheeses, vegetables, salads, and bread-based dishes like pizza, flatbread, or crostini. While many of these dishes will be served at room temperature—both for convenience and optimum flavor—try to include some hot and chilled dishes, as well, which will help stimulate your guests' palates.



Grilled Bread with Serrano Ham, Manchego, and Olives (recipe on page 150)

The full flavors and authentic ingredients of **tapas** account for their popularity.

Warm Spiced Lentils ▼

Serve this dish with pita bread wedges. Make sure not to overcook the lentils, or they will split and their texture will suffer. Substitute red or yellow lentils, if you prefer.

- 1 cup petite green lentils
- 1 small onion, peeled
- 4 whole cloves
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 (2-inch) lemon rind strip
- 1 tablespoon extravirgin olive oil
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup chopped red onion
- 1 cup chopped seeded tomato
- $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon ground ginger
- $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon ground cumin
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground turmeric
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon Hungarian sweet paprika
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon ground red pepper
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped fresh cilantro
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 8 lemon wedges

1. Place lentils in a large saucepan, and cover with water to 2 inches above lentils. Stud whole onion with cloves. Add studded onion, bay leaves, and rind to pan; bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat, and simmer 20 minutes or until lentils are just tender. Drain well. Discard onion, bay leaves, and rind.

2. Heat oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add chopped red onion; cook 5 minutes or until tender, stirring occasionally. Stir in tomato and the next 6 ingredients (through garlic); cook 2 minutes. Stir in lentils, cilantro, and parsley; cook 2 minutes. Stir in juice, salt, and black pepper. Serve warm with lemon wedges. Yield: 8 servings (serving size: about $\frac{1}{3}$ cup lentil mixture and 1 lemon wedge).

CALORIES 112 (17% from fat); FAT 2.1g (sat 0.3g, mono 1.3g, poly 0.3g); PROTEIN 7.4g; CARB 17.2g; FIBER 8.2g; CHOL 0mg; IRON 2.6mg; SODIUM 152mg; CALC 25mg

For a collection of small bites—from Spanish delicacies to Chinese dim sum—visit CookingLight.com/features.



▲ Grape Leaves Stuffed with Rice, Currants, and Herbs

Make this dish the night before a gathering, refrigerate overnight, and serve at room temperature.

- 24 large grape leaves
- Cooking spray
- 1 cup finely chopped onion
- ½ cup uncooked long-grain rice
- ½ cup chopped green onions
- 2 tablespoons pine nuts
- 1 cup water
- 2 tablespoons dried currants
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 1½ tablespoons chopped fresh mint
- 1½ tablespoons chopped fresh dill
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

- ⅛ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ cup plain fat-free yogurt
- 8 lemon wedges
- 1.** Rinse grape leaves with cold water; drain well. Pat dry with paper towels. Remove stems; discard. Set aside.
- 2.** Heat a large nonstick skillet over medium heat. Coat pan with cooking spray. Add 1 cup chopped onion; cook 7 minutes or until tender, stirring occasionally. Add rice, green onions, and nuts; cook 4 minutes, stirring frequently. Stir in water and next 7 ingredients (through cinnamon); bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat, and simmer 15 min-

- utes or until rice is tender. Cool slightly.
 - 3.** Spoon 1 rounded tablespoon rice mixture onto center of each grape leaf. Fold one side of leaf over filling. Fold opposite side of leaf over filling. Beginning at 1 short side, roll up leaf tightly, jelly-roll fashion. Steam grape leaves, covered, 10 minutes or until thoroughly heated. Cool to room temperature. Serve with yogurt and lemon wedges. Yield: 8 servings (serving size: 3 stuffed grape leaves, 1 tablespoon yogurt, and 1 lemon wedge).
- CALORIES 88 (12% from fat); FAT 1.8g (sat 0.2g, mono 0.4g, poly 0.9g); PROTEIN 2.7g; CARB 16.5g; FIBER 1g; CHOL 0mg; IRON 1.3mg; SODIUM 500mg; CALC 72mg



Keep It Simple

Your tapas offerings may include refined dishes, but they can also feature something as simple as a plate of olives. Consider assembling a platter of delectable ready-to-eat foods, which will save you time and still satisfy guests. Here are suggestions:

- Cured olives—niçoise, picholine, *lucques* (France), kalamata (Greece), and manzanilla (Spain), to name a few—are tasty party snacks. Gourmet and international markets offer the widest choices.
- Include a selection of cheeses. As with any cheese board, present a wide variety that ranges from soft to hard textures and from mild to strong flavors (for instance, goat cheese, Manchego, Parmigiano-Reggiano, and gorgonzola). Ask your cheese merchant for advice; he should steer you away from cheeses that might be popular but are not at peak quality, and encourage you to sample new varieties.
- Provide an assortment of cured hams and sausages, such as sopresata, prosciutto, and serrano ham.
- Offer a crudité medley to enjoy with tapas-style dips, such as Classic Tzatziki (page 200).

Grilled Bread with Serrano Ham, Manchego, and Olives

This simple dish shines when you use the ripest tomatoes you can find.

Dash of salt
 2 garlic cloves
 3 tablespoons extravirgin olive oil
 8 (½-inch-thick) slices Italian or French bread
 6 medium tomatoes, halved
 ¼ teaspoon salt
 ⅛ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
 ½ cup (about 2 ounces) very thin slices serrano ham or prosciutto

½ cup (2 ounces) shaved Manchego cheese
 ½ cup chopped pitted green olives
1. Prepare grill.
2. Mash dash of salt and garlic with a mortar and pestle or the back of a spoon to make a fine paste. Combine garlic mixture and oil in a small bowl.
3. Place bread on grill rack; grill 1 minute on each side or until golden brown.
4. Rub both sides of toasted bread slices with cut sides of tomatoes, squeezing

slightly to leave pulp, seeds, and juice on bread. Discard tomato peels. Spread garlic mixture over bread slices; sprinkle with ¼ teaspoon salt and pepper. Cut each slice diagonally in half. Arrange ham and cheese over bread pieces, and sprinkle with olives. Serve immediately. Yield: 8 servings (serving size: 2 pieces).

CALORIES 192 (42% from fat); FAT 8.9g (sat 2.1g, mono 3.7g, poly 0.6g); PROTEIN 7.7g; CARB 23.6g; FIBER 3.5g; CHOL 11mg; IRON 1.2mg; SODIUM 620mg; CALC 95mg

PLEASE SEE PAGE 198 FOR MORE RECIPES

Tapas FROM PAGE 150

Garlic Flatbreads with Smoked Mozzarella and Tomato Vinaigrette

Smoked mozzarella infuses this dish with distinctive flavor, though you can substitute regular mozzarella, if you prefer. Serve warm, or prepare in advance and serve at room temperature (store flatbreads and topping separately).

FLATBREADS:

- ¼ cup whole wheat flour (about 1 ounce)
- 1 cup warm water (100° to 110°), divided
- 1 package dry yeast (about 2¼ teaspoons)
- 2¼ cups all-purpose flour, divided (about 10 ounces)
- ½ teaspoon salt
- Cooking spray
- 1 teaspoon cornmeal
- 4 garlic cloves, thinly sliced

TOPPING:

- 3 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- 2 tablespoons extravirgin olive oil

- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ⅛ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- ¾ cup halved red cherry tomatoes (about 4 ounces)
- ¾ cup halved yellow cherry tomatoes (about 4 ounces)
- 1 cup (4 ounces) shredded smoked mozzarella cheese
- ½ cup thinly sliced fresh basil

1. To prepare flatbreads, lightly spoon whole wheat flour into a dry measuring cup; level with a knife. Combine whole wheat flour, ¼ cup water, and yeast in a bowl; let stand 10 minutes.

2. Lightly spoon all-purpose flour into dry measuring cups, and level with a knife. Combine 2 cups all-purpose flour, ½ teaspoon salt, and remaining ¾ cup water in a large bowl. Add yeast mixture, and stir until a dough forms. Turn dough out onto a lightly floured surface. Knead until smooth and elastic (about 10 minutes); add enough of remaining ¼ cup all-purpose flour, 1 tablespoon at a time, to prevent dough from sticking to hands (dough will feel sticky). Place

dough in a large bowl coated with cooking spray, turning to coat top. Cover and let rise in a warm place (85°), free from drafts, 1 hour or until doubled in size. (Gently press two fingers into dough. If indentation remains, dough has risen enough.)

3. Preheat oven to 450°.

4. Punch dough down; cover and let rest 5 minutes. Divide dough in half. Roll each half into a 9-inch circle on a lightly floured surface; place on baking sheets sprinkled with cornmeal. Lightly coat dough with cooking spray. Sprinkle dough evenly with sliced garlic; press garlic into dough using fingertips. Bake at 450° for 10 minutes or until crisp and garlic begins to brown. Remove flatbreads from oven; cool on wire racks.

5. To prepare topping, combine vinegar, oil, ¼ teaspoon salt, pepper, and minced garlic in a medium bowl. Add tomatoes; toss gently.

6. Preheat broiler.

7. Sprinkle each flatbread with ½ cup cheese; broil flatbreads 1 minute or until cheese melts. Remove from oven; top each flatbread with half of tomato mix-

ture. Sprinkle each flatbread with ¼ cup basil. Cut each flatbread into 6 equal wedges. Yield: 12 servings (serving size: 1 wedge).

CALORIES 139 (27% from fat); FAT 4.1g (sat 1.3g, mono 2.1g, poly 0.4g); PROTEIN 5.3g; CARB 20.2g; FIBER 1.3g; CHOL 5mg; IRON 1.4mg; SODIUM 194mg; CALC 73mg

Roasted Peppers, Anchovies, and Basil à la Merenda

A welcome addition to a tapas spread, this pungent salad also makes a delicious side for beef, chicken, or fish, and can be made ahead of time. This dish is named after La Merenda bistro in Nice, France.

- 3 yellow bell peppers
- 3 red bell peppers
- 1 tablespoon anchovy paste
- 1 teaspoon extravirgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon red wine vinegar
- ½ teaspoon chopped fresh oregano
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- ¼ cup chopped fresh basil
- ¼ cup niçoise olives, pitted

1. Preheat broiler.

2. Cut bell peppers in half lengthwise; discard seeds and membranes. Place pepper halves, skin sides up, on a foil-lined baking sheet; flatten with hand. Broil 15 minutes or until blackened. Place in a zip-top plastic bag; seal. Let stand 15 minutes. Peel and cut into 1-inch strips.

3. Combine bell peppers, anchovy paste, and next 5 ingredients (through garlic) in a medium bowl, stirring until well blended; let stand 30 minutes. Sprinkle with basil and olives. Yield: 6 servings (serving size: about ⅓ cup).

CALORIES 51 (32% from fat); FAT 1.8g (sat 0.3g, mono 1g, poly 0.3g); PROTEIN 1.7g; CARB 8.6g; FIBER 0.3g; CHOL 1mg; IRON 2mg; SODIUM 346mg; CALC 29mg

Stewed Mussels with Feta

Serve with crusty baguette slices so you can sop up the tasty broth.

Cooking spray

- ¾ cup minced yellow onion
- 4 cups chopped seeded peeled tomato (about 4 large)
- 1 cup dry white wine
- 1 teaspoon red wine vinegar

- ¼ teaspoon dried oregano
- ¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper
- 64 small mussels, scrubbed and debearded (about 2 pounds)
- 1 cup (4 ounces) crumbled feta cheese
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ⅛ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

1. Heat a large nonstick skillet over medium heat. Coat pan with cooking spray. Add onion; cook 4 minutes or until tender, stirring occasionally. Increase heat to medium-high. Stir in tomato, wine, vinegar, oregano, and red pepper; bring to a boil. Reduce heat; simmer 30 minutes or until thick. Add mussels; cover and cook 5 minutes or until shells open. Remove from heat; discard any unopened shells. Stir in cheese, salt, and pepper. Sprinkle with parsley. Yield: 8 servings (serving size: 8 mussels and about ½ cup tomato mixture).

CALORIES 177 (29% from fat); FAT 5.8g (sat 2.6g, mono 1.3g, poly 0.9g); PROTEIN 16.5g; CARB 10.1g; FIBER 1.2g; CHOL 44mg; IRON 5mg; SODIUM 562mg; CALC 114mg

Classic Tzatziki

A traditional Greek dip and gyro condiment, tzatziki also makes a tasty topping for sandwiches and even hamburgers. Serve with pita wedges or crudités.

- 1 cup grated seeded peeled cucumber
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup plain fat-free yogurt
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh mint
- 2 teaspoons chopped fresh dill
- 2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 2 garlic cloves, minced

1. Place cucumber on several layers of paper towels; sprinkle with 1/8 teaspoon salt. Let stand 30 minutes.
2. Combine cucumber, yogurt, and remaining ingredients, stirring until well blended. Refrigerate at least 1 hour before serving. Yield: 14 servings (serving size: 2 tablespoons).

CALORIES 9 (0% from fat); FAT 0g; PROTEIN 0.8g; CARB 1.8g; FIBER 0.1g; CHOL 0mg; IRON 0mg; SODIUM 72mg; CALC 24mg

Smoky Tomato Relish

Serve this rustic relish with pita wedges, as we do, or grilled shrimp or chicken. Blackening the vegetables in a cast-iron skillet gives the dish its smokiness. You can prepare it up to a day ahead and refrigerate.

- 1 green bell pepper
- 2 tomatoes (about 1 pound)
- 1/2 cup chopped onion
- 1 tablespoon extravirgin olive oil
- 1 1/2 teaspoons chopped fresh thyme
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh mint
- 2 teaspoons red wine vinegar
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon ground red pepper
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- Fresh flat-leaf parsley leaves (optional)
- 6 (6-inch) pitas, each cut into 4 wedges

1. Heat a large cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat. Cut bell pepper in half lengthwise; discard seeds and membranes. Flatten one bell pepper half with hand; add to skillet, skin side down. Reserve remaining bell pepper half for another use. Add tomatoes to pan. Cook 10 minutes or until blackened, turning frequently. Remove from heat; cool pepper and tomatoes to room temperature.



Sip Suitably

Tapas foods feature robust, assertive flavors, so select beverages to complement them. But be adventurous—a tapas party gives people a chance to sample drinks they might not find at another kind of gathering.

- Sherry is among the most traditional beverages to accompany tapas. To learn more about sherry and pairing it with food, see *Wine Tasting*, page 206.

- In general, full-bodied wines harmonize with tapas dishes. Consider Spanish wines, including those from the Rioja, Catalonia, and Ribera del Duero regions, as well as Italian wines, such as Barolo or Bolgheri.

- Spanish beers, such as Estrella Damm, may be hard to come by. Most light-bodied, crisp lagers and pilsners will do.

- To make the party even more special, pour glasses of *cava*, a Spanish sparkling wine, or Italian prosecco.

- Branch out and serve other beverages, such as Greek ouzo, Italian grappa, or French Pernod.

- Include sparkling water, such as Perrier or San Pellegrino. Follow the European custom and serve water chilled, but hold the ice.

2. Chop tomatoes, and place them in a medium bowl. Chop bell pepper; add to tomato. Stir in onion and next 8 ingredients (through garlic). Garnish with parsley, if desired. Serve chilled or at room temperature with pita wedges. Yield: 8 servings (serving size: 1/4 cup relish and 3 pita wedges).

CALORIES 156 (14% from fat); FAT 2.4g (sat 0.3g, mono 1.3g, poly 0.5g); PROTEIN 4.8g; CARB 29.1g; FIBER 2.1g; CHOL 0mg; IRON 1.5mg; SODIUM 390mg; CALC 51mg

Toasted Pita with Mint, Cucumber, and Tomato Salad

Put late-summer tomatoes to good use in this bright and herby salad. For even more color, leave the cucumber unpeeled—English cucumber skin is thin enough to be palatable. Make this dish close to serving time so it doesn't become watery.

- 1/4 cup fresh lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons extravirgin olive oil
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 3 3/4 cups chopped tomato (about 3 medium)
- 1 1/2 cups chopped peeled English cucumber (about 1)
- 1/3 cup thinly sliced green onions
- 1/3 cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh mint
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh cilantro
- 3 (6-inch) pitas, cut into 8 wedges

1. Preheat oven to 425°.
2. Combine first 5 ingredients in a large bowl, stirring with a whisk. Add tomato and next 5 ingredients (through fresh cilantro); toss well.
3. Arrange pita wedges in a single layer on a baking sheet. Bake at 425° for 6 minutes or until golden. Serve with salad. Yield: 8 servings (serving size: about 2/3 cup salad and 3 pita wedges).

CALORIES 116 (30% from fat); FAT 3.9g (sat 0.5g, mono 2.6g, poly 0.6g); PROTEIN 3.2g; CARB 18g; FIBER 2g; CHOL 0mg; IRON 1.2mg; SODIUM 274mg; CALC 43mg

Joanne Weir is a San Francisco-based award-winning cookbook author, cooking teacher, chef, and television personality. Her latest book, Weir Cooking in the City, is the companion to her PBS television series of the same name. Her book From Tapas to Meze was rereleased last year.