

make it an easy MORNING

Make-ahead holiday breakfast feast means less stress for the cook.

The holidays are a busy time for everyone and no one is busier than the family cook. This make-ahead morning menu can take a little of the pressure off and lets the chef put her – or his – feet up and relax.

We start with a cheese and ham strata and add delicious cranberry orange muffins. Accompany that with a fresh fruit salad made the night before and you've got a feast.

Easy Cheesy Strata

A strata is a great holiday morning dish. You prepare it the night before, refrigerate and then pop it into the oven to bake while you get to celebrate.

Ingredients

1 Tbsp butter
 1 Tbsp oil
 1 medium red pepper, diced
 1 cup green onions, chopped
 1 cup diced lean cooked ham (omit if you prefer vegetarian)
 5 slices bread, cut into 1/2" pieces
 1-1/2 cups sharp cheddar cheese, grated
 3 large eggs
 2 cups milk
 1 Tbsp Dijon mustard
 1/2 tsp dry mustard
 salt and pepper to taste

Directions

In a frying pan, melt butter and oil and sauté peppers for 4 minutes. Add onions and ham and cook for another 2-3 minutes. Remove from heat and let cool. Lightly spray oil on an 8" x 8" x 2" casserole dish. Layer half the bread on the bottom of the casserole dish. Cover with half of the cheese and half the cooled pepper/ham/onion mixture. Repeat the layers.

Beat the eggs, milk, mustard, dry mustard, salt and pepper together in a bowl and pour over the strata. Cover and refrigerate. In the morning, preheat oven to 350°F, remove cover from casserole and bake strata until the top is brown and the centre is set, about 45 minutes. Let stand for 10 minutes and serve. Serves 4-6.

Cranberry Orange Muffins

The secret here is to prepare the muffin mixture the night before. Mix all the dry ingredients together and store in a covered container. Do the same with the wet ingredients. In the morning, prepare the muffin cups, preheat the oven and mix the

dry ingredients into the wet, fill the cups and bake. What could be easier?

Ingredients

1 cup all-purpose flour
1 cup whole wheat flour (or all-purpose can be used)
1 cup sugar
1-1/2 tsp baking powder
1/2 tsp baking soda
1 tsp salt
2 Tbsp vegetable oil
3/4 cup orange juice
zest of 1 orange
1 egg, beaten
3/4 cup chopped fresh cranberries
1/2 cup chopped walnuts

Directions

Sift together dry ingredients and place in covered container. Combine oil, juice, egg and zest and place in separate cov-

ered container. Refrigerate the wet ingredients overnight. Prepare cranberries and nuts, if using, and store separately till morning.

In the morning, pre-heat the oven to 350°F and prepare muffin cups by greasing lightly. Pour wet ingredients into a large bowl and beat lightly to recombine. Add dry ingredients and mix together just to combine. Stir in cranberries and nuts and fill each muffin cup 3/4 full. Bake for 20 minutes. Let cool slightly, then turn out of cups. (Note the temperature is the same as the Strata, so they could be baked at the same time.) Serve warm. Makes a dozen muffins. 🌿

Hint: Top the fruit salad with gingered yoghurt for a real treat. Simply add 2/3 cup of minced, crystallized ginger to 2 cups of plain yoghurt, cover and refrigerate overnight.