

# Fireworks under the stars

How easy is it to turn your backyard into a five-star restaurant? This easy.

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**F**or a backyard party to appear chic, you need to exert even more control than usual. You don't want to be rushing back and forth to the kitchen, so think ahead and have a little table all set with condiments, a covered butter dish if you are offering bread, large cotton napkins rolled with just a fork, and all the plates and bowls. If you cover the table with a long cloth, you can hide more ice, paper towels, and bug spray beneath it. Find a beautiful, medium-sized planter, line it with a black or white garbage bag, and use it as an ice bucket (fill with bottles of white wine and a selection of beers, then tip in the ice). If guests will be standing on an uneven surface or on the grass, do let them know ahead of time so they can wear pretty, non-high-heeled shoes. And one of the easiest (and often overlooked) things to do is to check the forecast so you can look like a hero for planning dessert inside if the heavens open.

PHOTOGRAPHY SCOTT PETERSON FOOD STYLING KIM KISSLING PROP STYLING NISSA QUANSTROM

PORTOBELLO MUSHROOMS ON ARUGULA WITH PARMESAN CRISPS (RECIPE ON PAGE 48)



TERRA TEAK OUTDOOR TABLE SET ON PREVIOUS SPREAD; PAVELLO RECTANGLE TABLE, PAVELLO ARMCHAIRS & SIDECHAIRS, CAN BE FOUND AT WWW.TERRATEAKANDGARDEN.COM



#### QUICK BITE Easy Peas

I like to cut my sugar-snap peas lengthwise into three strips. If you prefer to leave yours whole, feel free, but I like the way they look all sliced up! Bring 3 cups of well-salted water to a boil and blanch the peas for 4 minutes, stirring a few times. Drain and quickly run under cold water to stop the cooking. Let air-dry for a bit, or blot dry with clean towels. Toss the peas with a splash of olive oil, a tablespoon of shredded mint, a sprinkle of fleur de sel, and a few grinds of black pepper.

WATERMELON AND CUCUMBER  
GAZPACHO SOUP  
(RECIPE ON PAGE 48)



**QUICK BITE**

**Haricots Verts  
with Parsley**

Blanch the haricots verts in well-salted water for about 3 minutes, then submerge in an ice bath or run under cold water in the sink. Dry beans in a colander for a few moments or blot with clean towels. Toss with 1 tablespoon of melted butter, 2 tablespoons of minced flat-leaf parsley, a sprinkle of fleur de sel, and a few twists of freshly ground black pepper.

## Portobello Mushrooms on Arugula with Parmesan Crisps

SERVES 6

This is a very simple dish, but not one you'd usually find for dinner at someone's house—it's more a restaurant specialty (although I can't imagine why). The combination of earthy mushrooms, cool peppery arugula, and the crunch from the salty, Parmesan Crisps is actually a perfect start to any meal. You can just shave or grate fresh Parmesan and forget the crisps if you'd like.

- ½ cup grated Parmesan
- 6 good handfuls arugula (about 2 to 3 bunches)
- 4 portobello mushroom caps
- ½ cup olive oil
- 1 teaspoon crushed garlic
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- ¼ cup pine nuts
- 1 bunch Italian parsley

1. Position a rack in the top third of the oven and preheat to 400°F.
2. Take a tablespoon of the Parmesan and carefully place it onto a sheet of parchment paper cut to fit an ungreased sheet pan. Repeat with the remaining Parmesan until you have 7 or 8 piles.
3. Cook for 5 to 9 minutes, or until the cheese melts into a bubbly thin pancake (pull it out of the oven if it starts to develop dark spots). Remove from the oven and allow to cool. Set the crisps aside on a plate, uncovered.
4. Cut the stems off the arugula and swish the leaves around gently in a big bowl of cold water to remove any dirt. Leave them for a minute so the leaves float to the top and the grit falls to the bottom. Lift the leaves out gently so as not to disturb the grit on the bottom of the bowl.
5. Spin the leaves dry (and when you think they're dry, just give them one more concerted whirl to get that last teaspoon of water out) then loosely pack in a plastic bag and refrigerate until you need them.
6. With a wet cloth, wipe the mushroom caps clean. Brush each one well with olive oil mixed with the crushed garlic. Sprinkle with salt and pepper; set aside.
7. Light the grill or set a large sauté pan over medium heat for 3 minutes. Cook the mushroom caps rounded-side down for 10 minutes, then turn them and cook for another 5 minutes.
8. Remove mushrooms, stalk-side up, to a shallow dish that can hold them in one layer, and sprinkle with lemon juice. Set aside until you assemble the salad.
9. Pile arugula in the middle of each plate and spoon the accumulated lemon-y juices over the top. Cut each mushroom cap into 8 slanting slices and, using a metal spatula, divide them onto the arugula. Break the crisps roughly on top and scatter with pine nuts and parsley.

## Watermelon and Cucumber Gazpacho Soup

SERVES 6

The only prerequisite to this recipe is really sweet watermelon, a sharp knife, and a steady cutting board. Don't be tempted to grate the ginger, as it's so nice to bite on a distinct little nugget. Peel the lump of ginger, cut thin slices and, stacking two slices at a time, cut into a fine dice.

- 3 cups watermelon juice from approximately 5 cups of cubed watermelon, puréed in a blender
- ¾ cup finely diced watermelon
- ¾ cup finely diced English cucumber, unpeeled and seeded
- 2 tablespoons minced scallion
- 1½ teaspoons finely diced fresh ginger
- 2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
- 1 tablespoon finely minced fresh mint

1. Mix together the watermelon juice, diced watermelon, cucumber, scallion, and ginger in a non-reactive container and chill for at least 3 hours or overnight.
2. Add the lime juice and fresh mint about an hour before serving.

## Salmon in Cracked Black Peppercorn and Fresh-Ginger Marinade

SERVES 6

On a hot summer day, I like chilled food, and this powerful marinade transforms a simple salmon fillet into something really delicious. Just make sure your ginger and garlic are fresh and firm and that your peppercorns still pack a punch.

I have allowed 3 pounds of fish for six people, but for lunch you might prefer less per person. Just cook all the salmon anyway and the next day, break leftover salmon into bite-size pieces and mix with soba noodles, ripe tomatoes, shredded basil, and scallions to make an easy supper.

- 3 pounds center-cut salmon fillet
- Marinade**
- 2 teaspoons cracked black peppercorns
  - 1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
  - 1 teaspoon crushed garlic
  - ⅓ cup soy sauce
  - ⅓ cup vegetable oil

1. Put the cracked peppercorns and all the marinade ingredients in a small bowl and whisk to mix well.
2. Lay the salmon fillets in a shallow dish and pour the marinade over them. This is one marinade that is best not left too long, so refrigerate for only 1 hour.
3. Grill or pan-cook the salmon on medium-high heat for 3 minutes per side. Let rest off the grill for 5 minutes. May be served warm or at room temperature.

## Tomato, Nectarine, and Smoked Mozzarella Salad

SERVES 6

This stunning combination is so simple, but its flavor depends on the very best ingredients. Try to find the ripest tomatoes or a variety of heirloom tomatoes—they can be dark red, yellow, speckled green, or even streaked with purple.

- 1 pound tomatoes
- 1 pound nectarines
- 2 tablespoons aged sherry vinegar
- 5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 bunch fresh basil
- 1 pound smoked mozzarella

1. Chose a wide, shallow bowl and just cut the tomatoes and nectarines straight into a medium mixing bowl quite casually—it won't be too long before you need them.
2. Sprinkle on the vinegar, olive oil, salt, pepper, and basil and toss gently to mix. Cut a slice of mozzarella for each plate, divide the tossed salad on top, and crown with a pretty leaf of fresh basil.



NUTRITION

**PORTOBELLOS ON ARUGULA WITH PARMESAN CRISPS:**  
PER SERVING: CALORIES 261 (216 from fat); FAT 25g (sat. 4g); CHOL 6mg; SODIUM 561mg; CARB 6g; FIBER 2g; PROTEIN 7g

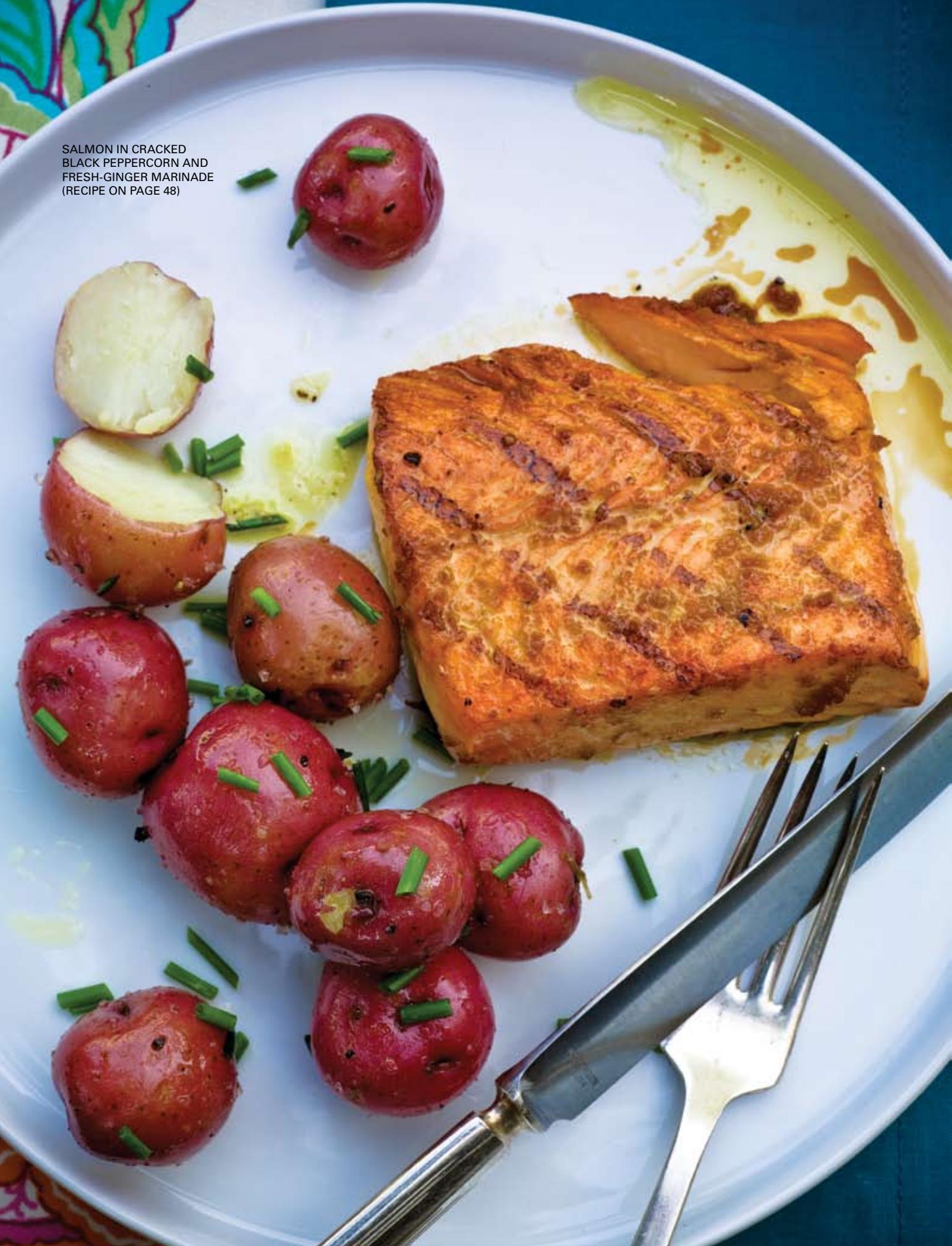
**WATERMELON & CUCUMBER GAZPACHO SOUP:**  
PER SERVING: CALORIES 23 (1 from fat); FAT 0g (sat. 0g); CHOL 0mg; SODIUM 86mg; CARB 5g; FIBER 1g; PROTEIN 1g

**SALMON IN FRESH-GINGER MARINADE:**  
PER SERVING: CALORIES 352 (143 from fat); FAT 16g (sat. 4g); CHOL 149mg; SODIUM 335mg; CARB 1g; FIBER 0g; PROTEIN 48g

**TOMATO, NECTARINE & MOZZARELLA SALAD:**  
PER SERVING: CALORIES 385 (266 from fat); FAT 30g (sat. 13g); CHOL 67mg; SODIUM 613mg; CARB 12g; FIBER 2g; PROTEIN 18g

**PEANUT CHEESECAKE WITH STRAWBERRY SLUSH:**  
PER SERVING: CALORIES 600 (354 from fat); FAT 41g (sat. 18g); CHOL 183mg; SODIUM 361mg; CARB 51g; FIBER 3g; PROTEIN 12g

SALMON IN CRACKED  
BLACK PEPPERCORN AND  
FRESH-GINGER MARINADE  
(RECIPE ON PAGE 48)



#### QUICK BITE

### Little New Potatoes with Chives

Place 2 pounds of small new potatoes in a pan and cover with well-salted cold water by no more than a ½ inch. Set the pan over medium heat and bring to a simmer. Cook for 15 to 20 minutes, depending on the size (test for doneness with the point of a small knife). Drain; toss with olive oil and scatter with fleur de sel, black pepper, and 2 tablespoons of freshly snipped chives.

### Peanut Cheesecake with Iced Strawberry Slush

SERVES 8

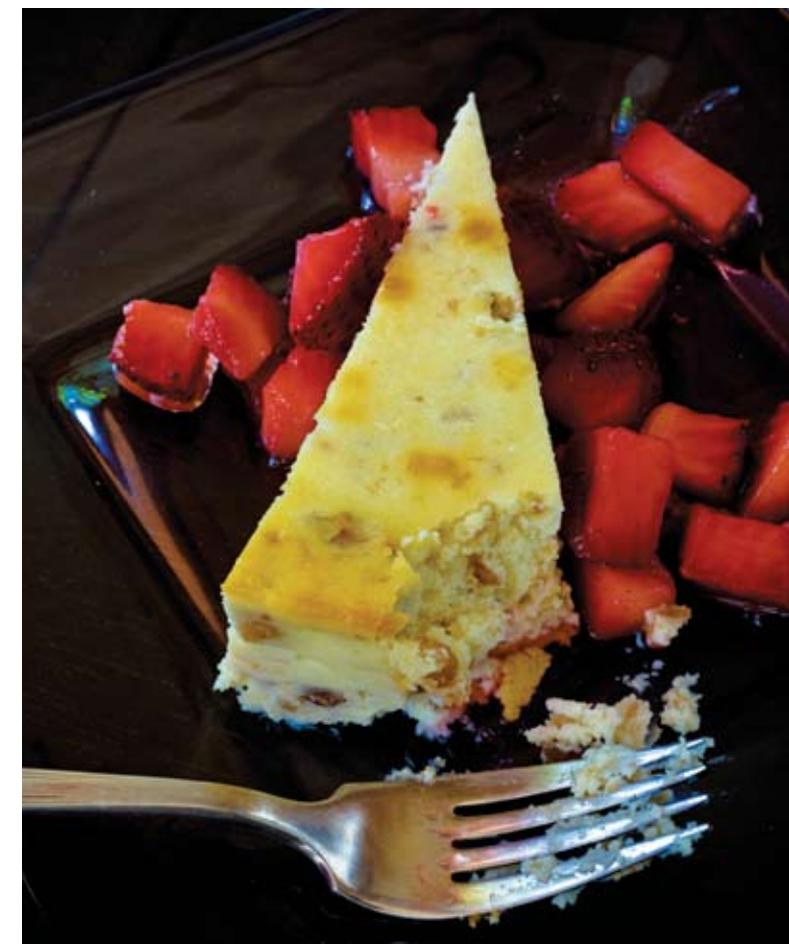
I had an epiphany the last time I made this cheesecake: I decided to try using a food processor instead of an electric mixer and it was so much quicker and easier.

The strawberry slush is just slightly frozen strawberries chopped up with some sugar. It completes my rather brilliant take on a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

#### Peanut Cheesecake

- 1 cup lightly salted cocktail peanuts, toasted
- 1½ pounds cream cheese, softened
- 1 cup sugar
- 3 extra-large eggs
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- Mint for decoration (optional)

1. Place a rack in the lower ⅓ of the oven and preheat to 350°F.
2. Toast the peanuts for 8 minutes and set them aside to cool completely.
3. Put the cream cheese, sugar, eggs, and vanilla, in the work bowl of a food processor and blend for 5 seconds. Scrape around the edge and blend again for 5 seconds. Add the cooled nuts and pulse 5 times so they're pretty much chopped up but with a few larger pieces.
4. Grease a 9-inch cake pan (see note 1). Pour the mixture into the pan. Set the pan in a larger container and fill 1-inch deep with hot water to create a bain-marie. Carefully put the bain-marie and cheesecake in the oven and cook for 45 minutes (see note 2). Test by sticking a thin metal or bamboo skewer in the center and look to see if it comes out barely clean; if not, give it another 5 minutes. (Remember, better under- than over-cooked).
5. Lift the cheesecake out of the bain-marie and set aside to cool completely. Cover and refrigerate overnight.
6. The next day, briefly dip the base of the pan in hot water so the cheesecake will release and turn out easily. Reverse the cake onto a flat cookie sheet, then turn back onto a serving plate and return to the fridge.



I cut fairly thin slices of this in the kitchen before guests arrive. Use a thin sharp knife, run it under very hot water, and wipe clean before each cut. A good sprig of mint in the middle is pretty.

Note 1: This pan will be submerged in a bain-marie, or a water bath. I prefer to use a standard high-walled cake pan that is lined with parchment paper, though if you choose, you may wrap a typical springform cheesecake pan comprehensively in tinfoil in a way that creates a waterproof casing. If you do the latter, test it first for water-tightness, and once you're satisfied no leakage will occur, add the batter and proceed.

Note 2: If you use a wider pan, the mixture will cook through more quickly, so start checking for doneness 10 minutes sooner. The cheesecake will firm up as it cools and, as I keep saying, it's better slightly under- rather than over-cooked.

#### Strawberry Slush

- 4 cups strawberries, hulled and roughly chopped
- ½ cup sugar

1. In a medium bowl, mix the strawberries and sugar together. Pour into a plastic container and refrigerate for up to 3 hours.
2. Put the strawberries in the freezer a couple of hours before you need them and stir them once or twice. Turn into a bowl and serve with the Peanut Cheesecake. ■