

Healthy Living Life



PREEMIE MOMS GIVEN A SHOWER

Mothers of babies in the neonatal intensive care unit don't often get to celebrate their new sons and daughters with baby showers. A group called Mommies Little Miracles is throwing baby showers for the mothers. **E2**

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Four new Muppet characters are representing healthy food groups: Fruits, vegetables, dairy and grains as part of their "Food For Thought: Eating Well on a Budget" initiative in New York. **E5**



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COMFORT FOOD

MARISA RENWALD

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A well-earned break from the kitchen

There's an odd period of time in between the holidays when all motivation to get into the kitchen and prepare something creative has fled like a passing thought. It isn't that there is a lack of enticing recipes; on the contrary, the media is a repository for appetizing autumnal recipes. Therein lies the problem. Too many delightful seasonal foods tease us with their flavors, colors and ingredients. By the time Thanksgiving comes and goes, we are exhausted from experimenting with all of those exciting recipes.

It's tough being so innovative. A lot of hard work goes into keeping up that reputation, but there's nothing wrong with relaxing a little in the kitchen. When you're starting to feel weary of holiday-inspired recipes or you're just plain burnt out from spending so much time in the kitchen plopping pumpkin inside raviolis, pureeing butternut squash or spreading sage into sausage stuffing, give yourself a break from the culinary pandemonium and whip up something quick and easy.

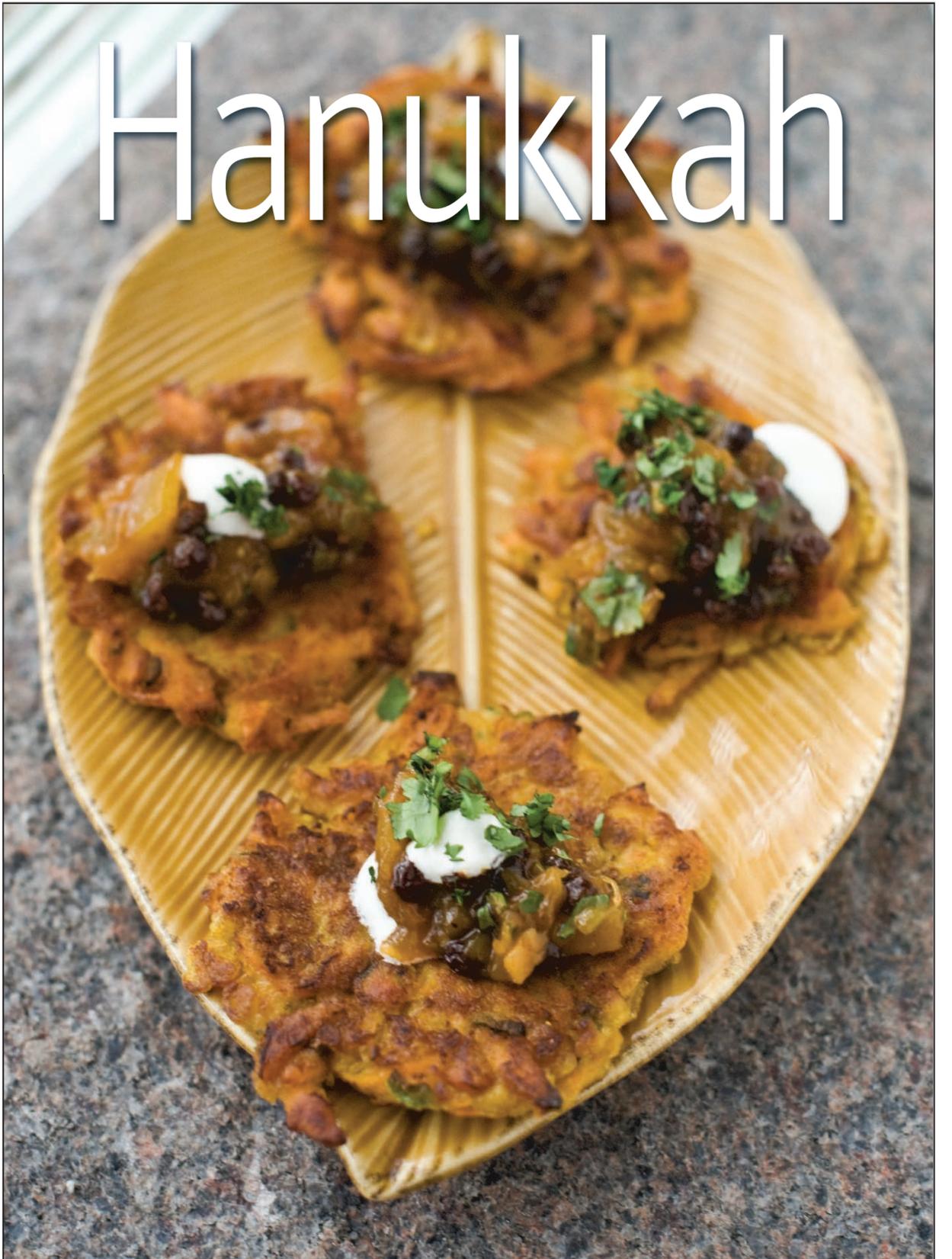
The slow cooker is truly the greatest invention for the kitchen since the conventional oven. And we can all be grateful for it, especially around this time of year when our lives are so much busier. The slow cooker's greatest facet? Its simplistic operating system that just lets us throw a bunch of ingredients in it in the morning, forget about it for the rest of the day and when we come home in the evening — voila! A feast for a family. It's quite magical, actually.

A delicious way to put your slow cooker to good use this season is with a hearty beef stew prepared with a good, heavy stout. Thick, tender pieces of beef shin simmer slowly in a flavorful consommé of carrots, onions and malty stout. After about four hours in a steamy bath, the meat emerges in an incredibly tender state, completely capable of falling to pieces if pushed ever so slightly with a spoon. The stout broth flavors the beef with a rich maltiness that carries through well into the vegetables.

This recipe is perfect for those times when a day in the kitchen creating a culinary masterpiece with autumn's greatest ingredients just doesn't seem feasible. Preparation takes only moments, but you'll never taste the minimalism.

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RECIPE E5



Sweet potato latkes with mango chutney: A perfect dish for Hanukkah or anytime. — PHOTOS BY RICH HEIN/SUN-TIMES MEDIA

ENTERTAINING



Blue cheese cheesecake with cabernet caramelized pears: This savory cheesecake is really more of a cheese course than a dessert. — THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Savory cheesecake perfect end to meals

BY ALISON LADMAN
For The Associated Press

The goal — liberate cheesecake from the dessert course. And it was easier than we thought.

While rich, creamy cheesecake is a fine way to end the meal, we didn't think it had to be sweet to do so. We wanted a savory cheesecake, one that could finish the meal as a cheese course. And so we cut the sugar and substituted blue cheese for part of the cream cheese.

And since blue cheese pairs so nicely with fruit, we added a topping of pears poached in red wine and balsamic vinegar. A black-pepper walnut crust accentuates the play on sweet and savory. The combination is breath-takingly rich and satisfying, as well as visually stunning. It is the perfect way to end a holiday meal.

But note — this cheesecake is exceptionally rich. Serve it in small slivers. Both the cheesecake and pears also hold well and can be prepared a day or two ahead. The pears can be served warm, room temperature or chilled. To reheat the pears, simply place them and the syrup in a large saute pan and heat over low.

RECIPE E2

BY AMY LAVALLEY
Post-Tribune correspondent

Jewish families around the world will light menorahs tonight at sundown and start the eight-day celebration of Hanukkah, which embraces religious freedom.

Though the holiday is most

known for its latkes, or potato pancakes, and sufganiyot, or jelly-filled doughnuts, it's always been a symbol of the triumph of religious freedom in times of adversity, local rabbis said.

"The essence of the holiday is that it's a celebration of faith over oppression, and along with that is the idea that this small group of people, united by a common cause, can triumph over a larger group," said Ben Kramer, rabbi at Congregation Beth Israel in Munster.

"Jewish families and the Jewish community are really drawn together by an event that happened a long time ago," he continued, adding the holiday's message resonates in any community where Jews are in the minority, including Northwest Indiana.

The centuries-old event focuses on Judah Maccabee and his brothers fighting against the Assyrian-Greek king at the time so they could practice their religion. After the battle, the Maccabees



Moroccan tagine and sweet potato pancakes with mango chutney: Caterer Wendy Pashman and executive chef Shawn Doolin of Chicago share a few dishes that put a new spin on Hanukkah meals.

— as they were known — cleaned the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

"The name 'Hanukkah' means rededication, and rededication is based on the fact that after the Maccabees drove the Assyrian-Greeks out of the temple, they rededicated the temple," said Stanley Halpern, rabbi at Temple Israel in the Miller neighborhood of Gary.

Another aspect to that rededication is that the Maccabees dedicated their lives, and the lives of those who died, to preserving Judaism. Most Jews at the time realized their religion was something important to maintain, Halpern said.

The traditional story of Hanukkah is that oil in a lamp at the temple was only supposed to last one day and lasted eight, hence the length of the celebration and the lighting of candles each night.

That's long been considered the miracle of the holiday, but it goes much deeper than that, Halpern said, adding the eight days actually represents how long Jews had their own king in place before the holiday began.

"Lighting the candles represents the eight days of the enthronement of the king, the eight days of the burning of the oil, and the miracle of what happened," including the survival of the Jews against much stronger forces, Halpern said.

The holiday takes on special significance for Jews when they are in the minority, as they were when the Maccabees fought back their enemies.

"It brings us together," Kramer said.

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