

Welcome to a Fall Afternoon Tea.....

Fall is the season of change. The leaves on the trees start to turn colors, slowly at first, and then they burst forth like the colors of a forest fire. The grass stops growing, finally. The animals start to get ready for winter, storing all sorts of nuts and foods to last them during their hibernation. There is crispness in the air, a slight chill, but a pleasant one. At times, in the evenings, you can smell the first aromas of someone lighting the fireplace. On weekends it's raking the leaves, which never seem to stop falling. Sometimes I think the trees grow new orange, gold, red and rust colored leaves just so I will have to rake them off the front lawn. Soon turkeys appear in the food stores and then, bam, it's a constant barrage of TV ads for all the toys and other items that are a must for the coming Holiday season. Finally, as November draws to an end, families, all over, sit down at the dining room table and give thanks for all their blessings. Of all the seasons, fall is my favorite.

So, with that in mind, let's sit down and plan a fall afternoon tea. First off, we need colors, reds, oranges, yellows and browns. The easiest way to do that is to put out colored table covers, then compliment them with a contrasting array of napkins and plates. A centerpiece of colored leaves can dress up any table, just be sure to go over whatever you bring inside to ensure that no uninvited guests are hiding among the leaves. Some small branches add texture and dimension to a small gathering of leaves. A spreading of various tree nuts on the table, or individual containers of nuts for guests to take home can also add to the fall feeling. Floral arrangements can be assembled using the flowers of fall; like mums, baby's breath, and mini colored carnations. Candles in orange, red, gold and yellow also lend a fall feeling to the table.

Think of using small pumpkins to hold things like flavored butter, sugar cubes, or soft cheese to spread. Once you cut off the top, just hollow out the mini pumpkin, scrape it clean and then stuff a paper towel inside to absorb any moisture left in the shell. Allow to dry overnight and then fill as you see fit. Depending on when you hold the tea, you can add a few holiday items, something

for Christmas or Hanukah to bring out the upcoming festive seasons. Simply playing some soft holiday music can also set the mood too.

As for the food, use festive and hearty items, like dark bread and wheat bread. A hearty soup served in mini cups or bowls always taste great on a chilly fall afternoon. As for the sweets, apple and pumpkin are a must for this time of the year. Bread pudding served in small containers is always a hit, especially if served warm. Use your imagination and be creative. There are no hard and fast rules here just whatever you feel is appropriate.

Tea time is by its nature a time for conversation, companionship, and friendly gatherings. It is a time to tell stories, to re-tell memories of years past and to make new memories for years to come. It is a relaxing time, friends with friends enjoying each other's company.

So I say to you, go forth and enjoy. I have presented you with an array of savory and sweet recipes for you to share with friends and neighbors. Have fun and enjoy, after all that's what teas are for.

Chef Cal