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## Mini-me munchies: Muffin tins make right-sized treats

### Gannett

Time to find the muffin tin, that seldom-used kitchen staple kept on hand for the occasional cupcake-baking frenzy – and not much else.

Turns out, it's a great tool for making breakfast, lunch, dinner and appetizers.

Fresh off the press this month are two cookbooks offering hundreds of recipes based on this humble pan.

Brette Sember's "The Muffin Tin Cookbook: 200 Fast, Delicious Mini-Pies, Pasta Cups, Gourmet Pockets, Veggie Cakes, and More" offers 200 ideas, from Reuben pies to ravioli lasagna.

Matt Kadey's "Muffin Tin Chef: 101 Savory Snacks, Adorable Appetizers, Enticing Entrees and Delicious Desserts" suggests creations such as baked eggs in prosciutto cups and lasagna rolls.

Sember's book was released two days earlier than Kadey's, and both authors blogged about their experiences with the pan. Both books have credentials to back them up: Sember's co-author, Melinda Boyd, is a registered dietitian, as is Kadey.

Why a muffin tin? Sember was inspired by a Betty Crocker children's cookbook she used as a child, which offered a meat-loaf recipe baked in the 12-cup pan.

"I think it's really a fun way to cook," the Buffalo, N.Y., resident says. "For a lot of people, cooking doesn't feel like fun. I think if you can make it fun and something your kids think is exciting and interesting, it makes it a lot easier to head into the kitchen and make dinner, you know?"

Cute and (usually) round, muffin-shaped meals are portable, easy to pack and kid-friendly, she says.

"Kids think that anything made in a muffin tin is going to be fabulous, because they're raised on cupcakes and muffins and those are terrific treats," says Sember. "So kids automatically think it's going to be a special treat."

And, says Sember, the muffin tin offers automatic portion control. Her recipes are accompanied by nutritional information and the calorie counts.

"You know exactly what you're getting," Sember says.

The muffin tin also makes it easy to make a lot of portions all at once, especially handy for the breakfast rush: egg crescent cups, ham-and-egg cups, or French toast for a crowd.

Yes, Sember offers muffin recipes, too, including several you've likely never tried before, like kiwi muffins with glaze, maple-bacon muffins and pistachio-orange chocolate chip muffins.

Muffin tins come in a variety of sizes, and Sember's cookbook offers recipes for each, mini to jumbo. Spritz the pan with a non-stick baking spray or line the cups with paper or silicone liners. Sember especially likes the flexible silicone liners which can be washed and reused.

While testing the recipes, Sember discovered she could use edible liners: refrigerated pie crust, crescent dough, biscuit dough, rice paper and even thin slices of ham.

"I thought that was the greatest stroke of genius," Sember says, laughing.

In developing his muffin tin cookbook, Kadey says he became a fan of muffin-sized individual pizzas.

"Once I figured out how to best fit the dough into the cups, I started playing with all sorts of classic and not-so-classic pizza combinations," Kadey says in an emailed response to questions. "One of my favorite recipes in the book is for a butternut muffin tin pizza.

"And silicon muffin trays are wonderful for frozen muffin-sized treats," Kadey added. "I'll blend up a big smoothie, freeze it in the silicon muffin cups and then when I want a quick, refreshing smoothie, I just drop a couple frozen smoothie cups in a blender with some liquid and I'm good to go. The possibilities are endless!"

And fun, too.

## Additional Facts

Egg Crescent Pockets

1 package of 8 crescent rolls (dough)

4 large slices of deli ham, cut in half

1/2 cup herbed goat cheese (or cheese of your choice)

Dried thyme, to taste

8 eggs

Salt and pepper

Preheat oven to 375 degrees Fahrenheit. Place 8 muffin cup liners in a regular muffin tin and spray the inside of them with cooking spray.

Open the tube of crescent roll dough and separate the pieces into individual triangles. Take one triangle and place the shortest side in the bottom of the cup. Fold the rest of the dough around into the cup, then press the dough around until it completely lines the inside of the cup and the edges meet.

Take half a piece of ham and fold it so it fits inside the liner. Place the goat cheese on top of the ham, and add a pinch of thyme.

Crack an egg and place it in the liner. Sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste. Bake for 20 minutes, until egg whites are completely set and crescent rolls are browned. Allow each to rest for a few minutes before lifting the cups out of the muffin pan.

Note: Try this with salami instead of ham, and provolone instead of goat cheese, for a different flavor. This is great with some fruit salad at brunch. Serves 8.

Source: "The Muffin Tin Cookbook," by Brette Sember with Melinda Boyd (Adams Media, \$17.95)

### Two-Cheese Smoky Chicken Cups

1 cup cooked chicken, shredded or finely diced

3 green onions, white and green parts, thinly sliced

1/2 cup finely chopped tomatoes, seeded and diced

1/2 cup finely chopped red bell pepper

1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar

2 teaspoons minced canned chipotle chile in adobo sauce

24 wonton wrappers

Grapeseed or canola oil, as needed

2/3 cup shredded mozzarella cheese (about 3 ounces)

2/3 cup shredded cheddar cheese (about 3 ounces)

1/2 cup reduced-fat sour cream

1 teaspoon grated lime zest

Juice of one-half lime

Salt and pepper

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. In a large bowl, toss together the chicken, green onions, tomatoes, bell pepper, apple cider vinegar, chipotle chile, and salt and pepper to taste. With a pastry brush, lightly coat both sides of the wonton wrappers with oil. Press the wrappers into 24 mini muffin cups, making sure the bottoms are as flat as possible. Place a small amount of mozzarella cheese in each cup. Top with the chicken mixture and then the cheddar cheese. Bake until the wonton wrappers are golden and crisp, about 10 minutes. Let cool for several minutes before unmolding.

In a small bowl, stir together sour cream, lime zest, and lime juice. Serve alongside the chicken cups. Serves 6 to 12.

Source: "Muffin Tin Chef" by Matt Kadey (Ulysses, \$15.95)

### Lasagna Rolls

9 whole-wheat lasagna noodles

2 cups store-bought pasta sauce or homemade, divided

1 1/2 cups reduced-fat ricotta cheese

4 ounces chopped spinach (about 3 cups)

1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese (about 4 ounces)

Salt

Torn fresh basil, to serve

Grated Parmesan cheese, to serve

In a large pot of water, cook the lasagna noodles according to the package directions until al dente. Depending on the size of your pot, you may need to do this in batches. Divide half of the pasta sauce among 6 jumbo muffin cups. Lay the noodles on a flat work surface and spread the ricotta cheese over each one. Top the ricotta with the spinach, and tightly roll the noodles. Slice each roll in half and stuff three lasagna rounds into each of 6 jumbo muffin cups with the cut sides up. Sprinkle the tops with a dash of salt. Top with the remaining sauce and the mozzarella cheese.

Bake until the cheese is melted and bubbly, about 20 minutes. Let cool for several minutes before unmolding. As they cool, the lasagna rolls will meld together. To unmold, run a butter knife around the edges, place a flat object such as a cutting board on top of the tin and turn upside down. If desired, serve with torn basil, grated Parmesan cheese, and/or additional pasta sauce. Serves 6.

Source: "Muffin Tin Chef" by Matt Kadey

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