

Real LIFE

Tough times need tough measures, plus advice on making the most of your money

NY party treats

By **RAE WILSON**

SOME may argue the measure of a first-rate party might be the music or the people, but there's no doubt party snacks can make or break a get-together.

As you prepare for our New Year's Eve festivities, and Australia Day in a just a few weeks, there are few tips to keep in mind.

Tonya Jennings, from On the Ridge Cooking School, said hosts should have a range of vegetarian and heavier options for guests, think about presentation, and have at least one "wow" dish.

"It's nice to have a combination of dishes: some you prepare beforehand and some you prepare at the time," she said.

"It sometimes breaks the ice if people cook things outside on the barbecue and they can be talking about it.

"You can do scallops on the barbie and just drizzle some lemon on them, or dip them in dukkah. Or you can do tossed calamari or cuttlefish on the barbecue or in the wok, which can be eaten with a toothpick or fork.

"People are often surprised at how simple and effective that can be.

"The thing I always look at is the presentation of the snacks and how it's going to look after a few people have some.

"Cost-wise, it's great to have something like focaccia, dukkah and oils because they're not too expensive and easy to eat.

"You want to include something that's substantial, especially if people are drinking.

"They like to have something that's going to fill up their tummy

without feeling overfull. That's why fritters are good: yoghurt can be used as a dip or can be drizzled over the top.

"But it's even great to have something as simple as sausage rolls – your mini handmade rolls – so you feel as though you're having something to eat.

"Cucumber rounds with cheese and smoked salmon inside are refreshing and they're going to hold up well over the night.

"Spicy nuts (see the recipe) are great because you can make them and have them any time.

"It's nice to have some vegetarian options, as well as some that are more heavy with bread and pastry.

"If you want to go for something a little more expensive, you can try lovely oysters with a vinaigrette sauce or splash of lemon, or shelled prawns with either the head or tail left on.

"When you think of time-saving, it can't get any better and it has a 'wow' factor.

"The simplest thing can look fabulous if served with care and attention."

Robert Smith, from Warana's Sunshine Food Warehouse, said the Christmas and New Year period was undoubtedly the busiest.

He said spring rolls, samosas and similar ovenable products came in boxes of 96 – perfect for parties – as well as smaller packs for convenience.

Mr Smith said spinach and cheese triangles were very popular, as well as the old favourites: pies, sausage rolls and vol au vents.

"But the party food is starting to get more adventurous now," he said.



TONYA JENNINGS: "You want to include something that's substantial, especially if people are drinking."

PHOTO: NICHOLAS FALCONER / 172601

"There's tandoori chicken risotto bites, roast pumpkin and cous cous bites. There's your salt and pepper squid, marinated prawn sticks.

"These days, you can bung just about everything in the oven. It's a lot cheaper than having a party catered and it's a lot easier to do."

Mr Smith said the warehouse

also sold a range of Sara Lee products, such as cheesecakes and danishes, and frozen cream-filled chocolate-covered profiteroles, which came in bags of about 50.

He said pastizzis were also a popular party food, with people travelling from Redcliffe for the pastries, which have a Maltese-European origin.



Ricotta and feta fritters with walnut and yoghurt sauce

175g ricotta, well-drained
1 small egg
1½ tsp plain flour, plus 2 tsp extra flour

freshly cracked pepper
50g feta, crumbled
olive oil for shallow frying
½ cup toasted walnuts, coarsely chopped
½ cup parsley, coarsely chopped

Yoghurt sauce:

½ cup plain yoghurt
¼ clove garlic, finely chopped
1 tsp extra virgin olive oil
¼ lemon, juiced

To make the fritters, combine the ricotta, egg, 1½ tsp of the flour and pepper in a bowl and crumble in the feta. Refrigerate and rest for 20 minutes. Form tablespoons of the mixture into fritters and dust with the extra flour. Heat the olive oil in the frypan over medium heat and cook the fritters for 2 minutes on each side or until golden. Drain on absorbent paper. For the sauce, combine the yoghurt, garlic, oil and lemon juice in a bowl and mix well. Drizzle the fritters with the sauce. Top with walnuts and parsley.

Festive spicy nuts

350g mixed salted nuts
2tbsp olive oil
1tbsp brown sugar
2tbsp sea salt

½ tsp cayenne pepper
¼ tsp ground turmeric
1tbsp sesame seeds
ground black pepper, optional
Combine all the ingredients, except for the sesame seeds, in a large frying pan, and cook, stirring constantly, for 5-7 minutes over a moderate heat until the nuts are browned. Toss in sesame seeds and cook, stirring constantly, for one minute, until pale golden. Add salt, pepper and spices to taste.