

# Your cheatin' appies: No shame in not cooking on New Year's Eve



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Seafood charcuterie with President's Choice products.

Yikes! Mere hours away from your New Year's Eve event and you're short on elegant canapés. Don't freak out, like I most definitely would: Consider some ready-made appies.

Piping Cheez Whiz onto celery isn't what I speak of (although I know of a cool professor type who would like nothing better, right John?) I talk of gourmet style appies dressed and ready to go. No cooking, no crying, no shame, often better-tasting than if you'd made them yourself. In some cases, that's a certainty.

I don't make all my appies from scratch, especially at New Year. Then, I'm a charcuterie-seeking missile aimed at Oyama Sausage Co. at the Granville Island Public Market. Don't bolt upon seeing a disheartening lineup on New Year's Eve. Twenty minutes here will earn you many oohs and ahs later. Lately, I've favoured duck prosciutto and Serrano ham.

Next, I walk over to Benton Brothers Fine Cheese and buy a couple of cheeses. Then I might stroll over to The Lobster Man and bag some beautiful oysters from the tank to serve on the half shell. I've served them with a grapefruit granita, but they're perfect with lemon wedges, too. Another seafood treat I like, although it's not for everyone, is fresh uni with potato chips (and a sparkling wine). Crazy, but I find it a perfect trinity.

Since in Metro Vancouver there are many finely tuned palates belonging to chefs, I phoned some for store-bought appie suggestions. They're a crazy busy lot, and do outsource at times.

Rob Belcham, of Campagnolo restaurants, is a fellow Oyama Sausage fan. "They make unbelievable cured or smoked hams, which I get cut paper thin. I'll get big chunks of pate de foie gras or country pate to serve with it and the best gherkins in the city, imported from France to serve with it."

Cioffi's in Burnaby, J, N & Z Deli in East Van, Greco's Specialty Foods in Surrey, D Original Sausage in Richmond, and Black Forest Deli in West

Vancouver are other options for charcuterie.



Oyama Sausage Co. on Granville Island. *WAYNE LEIDENFROST*

Belcham heads to Les Amis du Fromage for cheese.

“One cheese I really love is the triple cream Pierre Robert. It’s super, super delicious. And I’ll get a harder cheese, like Gruyere and aged Manchego, because they’re my favourite things to eat.”

He pairs them with membrillo (quince paste), some dried fruits and toasted nuts. “Hazelnuts are great because they’re local.”

He wouldn’t hesitate to serve the sausage rolls he recently tried from The Italian Bakery in Victoria. “People might turn their nose up at sausage rolls but then, with a little mustard, they’re hard to resist.”

Vikram Vij (Vij’s, My Shanti, Rangoli restaurants) freely admits even he buys store-bought appetizers.

“I use them all the time,” he says. He likes the Nanak brand of potato puffs

for one. “They’re filled with cashews, and they look like Tater Tots. Quite delicious,” he says. (Nanak products are available at Choices, Real Canadian Superstore and Walmart.)

Another favourite is Indianlife samosas and pakoras (frozen section of Whole Foods, IGA, Save-On-Foods, Choices, Meinhardt Fine Foods). “I don’t have the time to make the samosa dough. It’s like beef Wellington, and you have to get it flaky.” I have tried the samosas and agree — they’re great. Indianlife also has bottled chutneys and Indian spiced chips, and both of these companies are local.

At Rangoli, you can buy frozen samosas and Indian kebabs for a little more than supermarket prices. And At Whole Foods and Choices you can get Vij’s Delhi-Licious Kettle Chips with Indian spices.



Indianlife Samosas.



Indianlife Pakoras.

Hamid Salimian, culinary instructor at Vancouver Community College's Culinary Arts Program, says there was a time when he bought a pre-made pizza shell and baked it in the oven topped with cream cheese and Boursin cheese (half and half), then add smoked salmon, chopped shallots and dill. "I cut it in triangles and squares and all of a sudden, you have canapés."



Hamid Salimian's Smoked Salmon Pizza canapés.

Could Salimian recommend some ready-made Middle Eastern foods?

“Us Persians love eggplant dips, olive tapenade and hummus,” he says. “My partner likes to buy some pre-made hummus and doctor it up with puréed garlic, lemon juice and olive oil.”

I’ve found really good hummus at Mitra, in Ambleside, and Whole Foods Markets does a Mediterranean platter with hummus, baba ghanouj, tabbouleh, falafel, dolmas, roasted red peppers, olives, feta, pita and crackers.

Let’s not forget the abundance of Asian foods. Clement Chan of Torafuku doesn’t do store-bought but thinks sushi from one of the Fujiya Japanese stores around Metro Vancouver is always a safe bet.

Chinese Restaurant Awards judge Lee Man is big on barbecued duck or soy sauce chicken from Hon’s, or steamed buns.

“Chinese people wouldn’t expect you to have made that stuff at home,” he says. “You could buy a whole Peking duck, cut it into pieces and serve it with hoisin sauce and (put) green onions on top.”

Stores like T & T sell frozen dumplings and crispy onion pancakes that cook up quickly, he says. “When they’re puffy and crispy, they can topped with smoked salmon and cream cheese.”



Barbecued duck from Hong Kong Barbecue Master, in Richmond.

Quang Dang, of West restaurant, is a fan of fish cakes from FISH seafood store in Burnaby. “It just needs a little sauté in the pan.” Or go big, he suggests, and order a whole roasted suckling pig from Congee Noodle House. “Order in advance and you have a winner for a party.” And Les Amis du Fromage will put together a raclette or fondue party, providing food and equipment, he says.

Frank Pabst of Blue Water Cafe is another Oyama Sausage fan. He likes the duck and pork rillettes served with store-bought crackers. (For

dessert he likes the frozen cream puffs from Costco. Just drizzle them with a dark chocolate sauce.)

Ned Bell, the Vancouver Aquarium chef, is all about sustainable seafood and suggests a classic — thinly sliced smoked salmon with capers, crème fraîche with a touch of dill on toasted rye.

James Walt of Araxi finds store-bought tart shells a huge timesaver; you can fill them with your own fillings (quiche, shepherd's pie filling) but the no-work way would be to buy preserves (Langley's Vista d'Oro preserves would be awesome) for filling. "Just fill and fire in the oven," he says.

Victor Jacinto, Granville Island Hotel chef recommends the duck prosciutto from Oyama Sausage matched with focaccia from Duso's (also in the Granville Island Public Market) "It's a beautiful thing," he says.

Here's a few more lifesavers: The Gourmet Warehouse is a wonderland of gourmet food solutions. For instance, duck rilette from Hill's Food — pull apart the meat, and put it on corn tortillas with cranberry sauce left over from Christmas. (Or buy a jar of Ann Kirsebom cranberry chutney there.)

Proprietor Caren McSherry suggests buying the pre-made butter tart shells and filling with a mix of mascarpone cheese, a bit of horseradish and chopped baby artichokes, topped with balsamic "pearls" (sold there).

Truffle popcorn kernels are popular; just pop them. A newsroom editor raves about a Tartine Tarts flatbread with caramelized onions, Gruyere cheese and crème fraîche from Gourmet Warehouse. It's locally made, find it in the freezer section and just pop it in the oven and cut it up.

At Terra Breads stores their Pecan Fruit Crisps and house-made spreads, like the sugarless balsamic fig jam or cranberry compote, are a no-brainer. Just add some goat cheese. You'll also find an array of savoury focaccias there (herb and cheese works for me) that require zero work, except for cutting them into wedges.





Terra Breads' jars of spreads and dips.

At Well Seasoned gourmet store in Langley, the Chunky Bacon Jam goes well atop locally-made Hardbite Potato Chips, topped with a spear of chive. Their chocolate “salami”, ready for slicing is well received, too.

In Loblaw’s and Real Canadian Superstore freezer aisles, you can find some real time savers. Tuna Tataki with sustainable wild albacore tuna has been the season’s hit. Other popular items are Maple and Rye Cold Smoked Salmon, Olive Oil and Rosemary Focaccia Crackers, and Sustainably Sourced Wild Sockeye Salmon.



Seafood charcuterie with President's Choice products.

At Urban Fare, chef Ryan McDonald suggests Urbani Stuffed Risotto Balls, baked in the oven with your favourite tomato sauce. When crisped, skewer them and garnish with shaved Parmesan.

He says Emmi Authentic Swiss Cheese Fondue Kit is great because you can have a fondue out in minutes and look like a pro. A jar of Wild Hibiscus Flowers in Syrup is a super impressive way to dress up sparkling wine at midnight. “Just drop one of these flowers in your glass and watch it bloom while it colours and flavours your drink,” he says.

Costco's frozen food aisles hold hidden secrets (other than the cream puffs Pabst loves). The company shared their “really hot” items for this season: Cuisine Adventures Spanakopita, Sum-m! Asian Appetizer Pack, Grande Gourmet Panko Breaded Shrimp, Grande Gourmet Coconut Shrimp with Sauce, Diamond Harvest Shrimp Ring, Cuisine Adventures Franks in A Blanket and Royal Asia Calamari.

Tick, tick, tick. Better get a move on, unless you want your guests to be crunching on celery sticks with Cheez Whiz.

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