



## Celebrate family get-togethers, differing palates

By CASSANDRA DOWELL - [cdowell@shawmedia.com](mailto:cdowell@shawmedia.com)

Created: Saturday, November 24, 2012 3:40 p.m. CDT

Updated: Monday, November 26, 2012 9:41 a.m. CDT



Tonya Leonard served a hearty salad, mashed potatoes with pesto, roasted veggies and pita and hummus among other vegetarian food items during a recent family get -together at her Wauconda home. (Cassandra Dowell)

Tonya, Corina and Tony Leonard agree that each time they get together with family and friends to share a meal, new memories are created. Because of each family member's differing dietary preference – parents Corina Leonard and Tony Leonard eat meat while their daughter, Tonya Leonard, does not – they often explore new flavors while enjoying familiar tastes.

Sharing meals with family and friends, especially when different dietary concerns are involved, needn't be stressful, said Kim and Ellory Bisk of Kim and Ellory's Kitchen, a personal chef and buffet catering service in Gurnee.

"Over the last three years we have seen such an increase in the speciality diets, and we've had to grow along with that," Ellory Bisk said, adding that many clients often have vegetarian, gluten-free or diabetic concerns. "Now in the market place there are so many more items for those with dietary needs."

While preparing a recent family dinner in her Wauconda home, Tonya Leonard cooked vegetarian dishes confident they would satisfy even meat eaters.

"I try to make food all palates can enjoy," Tonya, 27, said as she pulled roasted vegetables out of the oven, whipped pesto sauce into mashed potatoes and mixed together fresh veggies – including marinated artichoke hearts, caramelized onions, sun-dried tomatoes and lettuce – to make a hearty salad.

The amateur chef said her love of cooking began as she learned there was much more to vegetarianism than "starches and cheese."

The evening's dinner spread included pita chips and hummus to start and quinoa, a grain-like crop that can be used in place of rice or in salads, with seasoned vegetables as a main entree.

Quinoa can be served cold or warm and is low-fat, gluten-free and high in nutrients, Kim Bisk said.

"Quinoa is great as an entree or a side dish and is transitionally used as a salad and can be a great substitute," Kim said.

Ellory said another tip for those looking to avoid meat products in soup and other recipes include using vegetable broth in place of chicken or beef broth.

Tony said the variety of flavors available in vegetarian dishes have made him enjoy skipping meat when dining with his daughter.

The dishes Tony enjoys today are much different than those he grew up with as a native of Ireland, he said.

"My mom made British-type food, shepherd's pie, fish and chips, meat and potatoes," he said.

Today, he said, "I laugh when people ask, 'If you don't eat meat what can you eat?' There are so many meals you can prepare. Lasagnas, even shepherd's pie – there are vegetarian versions of that."

Tonya said she often hears people denounce vegetables without giving them a chance.

"When veggies are raw they can be tasteless," Tonya said. "It doesn't take much to make them flavorful, such as adding spices and experimenting with new ways of cooking."

For those attending a get together and uncertain of what food will be served, Kim suggests reaching out to the host and sharing concerns.

"Be vocal and let them know," Kim said. "So the host can plan ahead and come up with a great idea. Don't be afraid to say, 'I'll be happy to bring something.'"

Tonya said she's learned that if she doesn't come prepared she'll often have nothing to eat.

When she brings a dish to pass it's an opportunity to share new flavors with others, she said.

"Often times people are intrigued by the food and respond positively," she said.

Tonya also said for those who aren't accustomed to her vegetarian diet, trying to cook a new recipe that she and other diners will like is fun.

"Some people take it as a challenge," Tonya said. "They want to make you something you'll like."

Ellory advised not to be afraid to take risks when it comes to cooking.

"The worst thing that will happen is that you'll learn something new," Ellory said. "Make sure everything is balanced. Food is a great conversation starter. People are not afraid to talk about food."

### **Recipe: Holiday Quinoa**

#### **Quinoa:**

1 ½ C raw Quinoa (1/4 C raw = 1 C Cooked)  
3 C Water  
1 C Dried Cranberries  
1 C Sweet Potatoes (diced small)  
¼ C Green Onions (sliced thin)  
2 T Pecans (chopped)

#### **Dressing:**

3 T Orange Juice  
2 T Lemon Juice  
1 ½ T Olive Oil  
1 T Orange Rind  
½ t Salt  
¼ t Pepper  
1 Garlic Clove (minced)

Boil quinoa in water for 15-20 minutes. Drain and let cool. In a small sauce pan (with enough water to cover) add a pinch of salt and boil the cranberries and diced sweet potatoes, until potatoes are tender, but not mushy. Saving the liquid from the sauce pan, drain the cranberries and sweet potatoes, and set aside.

Add the potatoes and cranberries, as well as the green onions, to the quinoa. Mix all dressing ingredients, along with the water saved earlier. Pour over the quinoa and mix well. This side dish can be served cold or warm.

*-Recipe by Kim and Ellory's Kitchen*