

# LIVING WELL

the best in food and entertaining

## Tradition With a Twist

TV chef Nikki Shaw invites you over to her house and shows you how to add island flavor to a holiday party for family and friends

BY JONELL NASH  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CAREN ALPERT

FOOD STYLIST: RANDY MON, PROP STYLIST: CARYL EAGLEZENOBIA. SEE WHERE TO BUY FOR DETAILS.



## HOLIDAY MENU

California Crab Cakes With Spicy Dipping Sauce

Jamaica-Me-Crazy Jerk Turkey

Paradise Rice Pilaf

Collards and Cabbage Combo

Candied Yams and Pineapple

Banana Pudding With Shortbread Cookies

Auntie Brenda's Sweet Potato-Pecan Pie

Coconut Rum Eggnog

Mango Passion Punch

A beautifully set table is a feast for the eyes.



California Crab Cake appetizers offer a warm, tasty welcome.



## Playing With Tradition BY NIKKI SHAW

I love the holidays and the trips back in time that they bring. We are blessed to have four generations present in our family. Nana tells my children—her great-grands—the same stories and passes down the same traditions as she did with me. But creating new memories is also really special. For festive gatherings, I plan the menu and decorate my home to appeal to our five senses. My recipe for success:

Favor **FLAVOR**: I layer the flavor in all my dishes. Each ingredient I add brings a little excitement, like a habanero pepper in the greens, saffron in the rice and pineapple chunks thrown in with the yams. And I use shortbread cookies instead of vanilla wafers in the classic banana pudding.

Keep color in **SIGHT**: To decorate the table, living room and tree, I go with gold tones, burgundy and reds that shout holiday. (And I dress myself in winter white.) Candles lit throughout the house cast a warm glow. ▶



## eating well



Coconut Rum Eggnog gets a sprinkle of nutmeg.

Reach for **TOUCH**: The table is set with items made of wood, crystal and china, plus African beads and silky cloth napkins—all with a different feel.

Add swell **SMELL**: The holidays have fragrances all their own—cinnamon and spice from freshly baked pies, pine from a grand tree and fresh flowers arranged everywhere.

Surround with **SOUND**: I'm as serious about my music as I am about my cooking. I play my old-school jams instead of typical holiday songs. At the top of my playlist is "Happy Feelin's" by Maze featuring Frankie Beverly. And there's nothing like Anita Baker's "Angel," Mary J's "My Life" and even Phyllis Hyman's "Betcha by Golly, Wow!"

Last, I want guests to leave with a little gift. It might be a bag with assorted goodies like gift certificates, CDs, DVDs, chocolates, a bottle of nice wine or sparkling cider. Just a little somethin' that says thanks for sharing your day with us. ▸



We are family: Brianna (left), Bianca (with mom), dad Brian Shaw and Brian, Jr., (B.J.) join in on the best gift of all—being together.





The couple share a toast.

## California Crab Cakes With Spicy Dipping Sauce

Makes about 18 appetizers.

2 tablespoons butter  
1 teaspoon fresh minced or crushed garlic  
1 egg, beaten  
2 tablespoons mayonnaise  
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard  
2 tablespoons finely chopped cilantro  
2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice  
1½ tablespoons Old Bay seafood seasoning  
2 cups Panko bread crumbs  
2 cups lump crabmeat  
4 cups safflower oil

In small skillet, heat butter; lightly sauté garlic. In mixing bowl, combine garlic with remaining ingredients, except crab, bread crumbs and oil. Gently fold in crabmeat; mix well.

Place bread crumbs in medium-size bowl. Shape crab mixture into 1½ inch balls; roll in

bread crumbs and lay on cookie sheet. In large, deep skillet, heat safflower oil to 350°F. Cooking in 2 or more batches as needed to avoid overcrowding, using tongs, transfer crab cakes to hot oil. Fry about 1 minute on each side. Place paper towels on a cookie sheet; transfer crab cakes as cooked to towels to drain oil. Serve with spicy dipping sauce.

## Spicy Honey Mustard Dipping Sauce

1 teaspoon Chinese hot mustard  
¼ cup Dijon mustard  
¼ cup mayonnaise  
¼ cup honey  
1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh cilantro

In small bowl, whisk together all ingredients until blended. ▷

## Candied Yams and Pineapple

Makes 12 servings.

6 large yams (about 4½ to 5 pounds), use orange-flesh yams  
1 stick butter  
½ cup granulated sugar  
¾ cup packed light brown sugar  
2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract  
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon  
1 teaspoon ground or grated nutmeg  
½ cup water  
2 cups fresh pineapple chunks

Peel and cut yams into ½-inch-thick pieces. Place yams in large pot of boiling water; cook until tender, about 10 to 12 minutes. Drain yams in colander. In medium-size pot, over medium heat, melt butter. Mix in both sugars, vanilla, cinnamon, nutmeg and water. Bring to light simmer and cook over low heat 2 to 5 minutes. Stir sauce constantly.

Heat oven to 350°F. In 2½-quart baking dish, place yams and pineapple chunks. Pour sauce over mixture; gently toss to coat yams. Bake, basting occasionally, until liquid is bubbling and yams are tender and glazed, about 30 to 40 minutes.



Candied Yams and Pineapple glisten with festive flavor.

## eating well



From left: Barbara Eggleston (Nana), Paula Welsh (mom), Nikki and Bianca.

“We are blessed to have four generations present in our family.”



The perfect meal: a balance of spicy, creamy, crisp, rich and lean.

### Collards and Cabbage Combo

Makes 12 servings.

- 4 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- 2 smoked turkey wings or other parts
- 2 large bunches collards (about 5 pounds), well washed and sliced or chopped, or two 1-pound bags prewashed collards
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- 1 whole habanero pepper or Scotch bonnet pepper
- 1 teaspoon seasoned salt
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 cups cabbage, sliced into ½-inch-wide ribbons

In large pot, bring broth and turkey parts to a simmer. Cover pot; simmer on low for 45 minutes. Remove turkey parts. Add collards, garlic, habanero, salt and black pepper to broth. Simmer on low for 20 minutes, covered. Stir in cabbage and simmer until tender, about 10 more minutes. Do not overcook. Taste and adjust seasoning. Remove habanero before serving. ▷



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### Paradise Rice Pilaf

Makes 12 side-dish servings.

- 2 tablespoons olive or canola oil
- 2 green onions, chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, diced small
- 4 garlic cloves, crushed
- 7 to 8 cups chicken, turkey or vegetable broth
- 4 cups uncooked white rice
- Optional: Stir in ½ teaspoon crushed saffron threads or turmeric

In Dutch oven, sauté onions, bell pepper and garlic in oil, about 5 minutes. Add broth; bring to simmer. Stir in rice; reduce heat to low. Cover tightly and cook 20 minutes. ►



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From left: Barbara Eggleston (Nana), Paula Welsh (mom), Nikki and Bianca.

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For the grand finale: Auntie Brenda's Sweet Potato-Pecan Pie and Banana Pudding With Shortbread Cookies will have guests floating on a cloud.

“  
his year I wanted  
a holiday that would have us  
soaking up sun instead of  
sinking in snow.”

### Mango Passion Punch Makes 12 servings.

½ gallon mango nectar  
1 quart passion fruit juice  
1 quart pineapple juice

In large pitcher or punch bowl, combine all ingredients. Add ice. Garnish with fresh fruit. Add rum or vodka to make cocktails.

### Coconut Rum Eggnog Makes about 20 servings.

1 gallon eggnog, chilled  
1 cup coconut rum  
Garnishes: whipped cream and nutmeg

In punch bowl or 2 pitchers, combine eggnog and rum. Ladle or pour into cups. Top each drink with a dollop of whipped cream and sprinkle of nutmeg.

### Banana Pudding With Shortbread Cookies Makes 12 servings.

¾ cup butter  
3 cups sugar  
4 tablespoons cornstarch  
½ teaspoon salt  
Two 13-ounce cans evaporated milk  
6 egg yolks, room temperature  
3 teaspoons vanilla extract  
Two 10-ounce boxes Lorna Doone shortbread cookies  
7 ripe yet firm bananas  
Meringue:  
6 egg whites, room temperature  
½ cup sugar, preferably superfine  
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

In large heavy-bottom sauce pan, melt butter. Stir in sugar, then add cornstarch and salt. Gradually stir in milk. Cook 5 to 10 minutes, stirring constantly.

In small bowl, beat egg yolks well. While beating yolks, add about ½ cup of hot mixture into the bowl. While stirring hot mixture, slowly add yolk mixture back into double boiler (this method prevents the eggs from cooking). Cook 2 more minutes, until thickened. Remove from heat; add vanilla. Lightly butter 9-by-13-inch glass baking dish. Line bottom and sides of dish with cookies. (For eye appeal, alternate banana slices with cookies along sides of dish.) Slice half of the bananas to cover bottom layer. Top the bananas with half of the pudding. Crumble cookies and generously sprinkle a layer over pudding. Layer with remaining banana slices and remaining pudding.

Heat oven to 375°F. In clean bowl, beat egg whites until soft peaks form. Gradually beat in sugar, until peaks are stiff and glossy. Beat in vanilla. Spread meringue over pudding. Bake until top is golden, about 10 minutes. □



Visit [ESSENCE.COM](http://ESSENCE.COM) for our Holiday Entertaining Guide, which features 100 festive recipes, including Nikki's Jamaica-Me-Crazy Jerk Turkey, Auntie Brenda's Sweet Potato-Pecan Pie and Paradise Rice Pilaf. This guide also presents themed menus and party tips for five memorable celebrations.