

## BOAT COOKING

There are disadvantages to being a well-known cook. I've had friends not invite me to dinner because they are sure they could never cook up to my standards. I've tried to tell them that I don't care, we could send out for a pizza, but you know how it goes. Another disadvantage is that I'm often hit up to cook for a good cause, such as a charity raffle prize. That means I get to perform in a strange kitchen, with someone else's dull knives and too-small pots and pans, and with the pressure of living up to the advance billing.

Much of the time I can duck these little assignments, but recently I got caught. I'm chairman of the board of the Sacramento Men's Chorus, and we just had our holiday concerts last month. And I got promoted into doing a fancy dinner for whoever sold the most tickets. And to make matters worse, it was a tie. And to make things even worse, this dinner is supposed to be served on the 32-foot Chris Craft belonging to the president of the Chorus, while we have a leisurely cruise up the Sacramento River. In January. During the floods.

So the upshot of all of this is that next weekend I am supposed to serve a fancy dinner to 8 people, (by the time you add in significant others and what-have-you), on a 32-foot Chris Craft with a two-burner hot-plate and a small boat barbecue hung out over the stern rail, that has a tendency in any sort of weather to tip over and dump the meat into the river. The last time I was on the boat for dinner the skipper dropped the entire barbecue over the side. And the hot-plate has only two settings—off and blow torch.

Well, I could always leave town, but moving is so expensive these days. And where would I go—I've got a Great Dane, an Irish Wolfhound, a mutt, and 4 cats. I can't just throw things in the back of the car and take off! So I've got to figure out something.

Fortunately I've cooked on boats before. And there is a small microwave on board that will take a covered casserole. So catering becomes the order of the day. The first course is simply going to be hors d'oeuvres that can be set out, like a few bowls of nuts and some store-bought humus and pita chips.

I'll need to use the barbecue for my main course, but I think I can do a beef shish kebob. I'll marinate the chunks of sirloin in red wine, garlic, black pepper and rosemary stalks, and thread them on the pre-soaked bamboo skewers with some chunks of zucchini and some pearl onions that I've pre-cooked in my own microwave, and maybe some slices of sweet red pepper. I use two skewers per kabob, spaced about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of an inch apart, to keep the food from falling off or rolling over.

To serve with the shish kebob, I'll get a box of quick-cooking couscous, which is made of little wheat granules. You just add it to boiling water and stir until it fluffs up. Plain couscous is pretty dull, but I'll make it with canned chicken stock and some currents that I've soaked in warm water, and garnish it with some chives and some pine nuts that I've toasted the day before and brought in a small ziplock baggie. I could make this on the boat's hot plate, but I'll probably make it at home and bring it to the boat in a covered casserole which I can reheat in the microwave. The salad will be a Greek salad, with lettuce, cucumber, sliced onion, feta cheese, pitted Kalamata olives, and a dressing made ahead of time with fresh lemon juice, olive oil, salt and pepper, and chopped fresh oregano from my garden.

For dessert, I'm thinking of peeling and cutting up a couple of fresh pineapples into chunks, pouring a little white crème de menthe over the pineapple, and letting it sit all day or even over night. I'll serve little bowls of the marinated pineapple, with some excellent Pepperidge Farm Mint Milano cookies alongside. With enough wine to pour into the guests, I may be able to pull this off. Or we could always just pray for rain.

This is Steve Muni for the Hometown Cook.