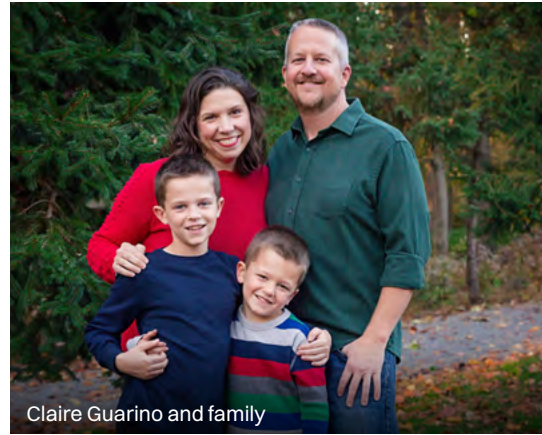


# Brandywine Table

## Simpler Suppers

LOCAL BUSINESS CREATES MEALS AND HOLIDAYS THAT ARE DELICIOUS, SIMPLE AND KID-APPROVED.

Alyssa Thayer



Claire Guarino and family

**D**INNERTIME CAN EASILY MORPH INTO A DREADED time when the conditions are right. Fatigue from the day, lack of time and strong opinions from kiddos all work together to create the perfect storm.

“Our whole business is trying to take the stress out of mealtimes, whether it’s a Tuesday night in October with dance or soccer, or Thanksgiving Day and you’re serving a picky relative,” says Claire Guarino, owner of HomeCooked in Paoli.

Claire came up with the idea while living with her now-husband in California. She was working long hours and marathon training, and that left little room for anything else. “By the time I got back from work, I was too tired to cook,” she remembers.

Claire came across a healthy meal-prep service and decided to give it a try. “It’s amazing how a simple change like eating less-processed, made-from-scratch meals can have such a positive change on your life,” she recalls. The couple traded their sodium-laden takeout for roasted salmon and veggies, and it changed their lives.

Inspired by this experience, Claire left her corporate job to bring a similar concept back to her native Pennsylvania. In 2006 she chose a location just across from the Paoli Train Station, and “HomeCooked” was born.

Claire says their food is mostly ready-to-cook, rather than ready-to-eat, which sets it apart from the prepared foods you find at the local grocery store. Their chicken fajitas come with pre-sliced peppers and butcher-trimmed meat, and it all comes spiced and inside a

pan with specific cooking instructions. “Yes, we are selling food, but really we are selling convenience,” she says.

While many customers order for themselves, the meals have also gained popularity as the ultimate gift for new parents or someone going through chemo or surgery. “That is one thing I have learned more than anything,” she says. “There are so many good people in the world, and they want to help their loved ones.” Often folks don’t know how to help, so the ability to give quality, pre-prepared meals is very welcomed.

Other than a few mainstays, the monthly menus rotate with the season. “Warm turkey chili in the fall and fancier hors d’oeuvres for Christmas Eve,” says Claire. Holidays have become an increasingly large part of their business, and Claire says their goal is to help people enjoy the day rather than getting up at the crack of dawn and collapsing into bed at night. “We do all the prep, but our clients can take all the credit,” she laughs.

Whether you’re gearing up for a DIY holiday or planning to get a little help, we’ve gathered some tips, tricks and recipes to help you make it simple, tasty and family-friendly.



Sweet Potato Casserole



Butternut Squash Wild Rice Casserole

### Pasta e Fagioli Stew (Slow-Cooker, Stove or Pressure Cooker)

*This simple meal is especially satisfying on chilly fall evenings. The best part is it can be prepped and added to a slow cooker early in the day and be ready to serve to hungry mouths at dinnertime.*

Serves 4-6

- 2 C. petite diced tomatoes with juice
- 3 C. cooked ground beef (cook 1.5-2 lbs. and drain any grease)
- 1 C. kidney beans (cooked/canned and drained)
- 1 C. cannellini beans, or any white bean (cooked/canned and drained)
- 1 C. each of chopped onion, celery & carrots
- 1 T. olive oil
- 1 C. beef stock
- ½ tsp. salt + dash of pepper
- 2½ tsp. dried parsley
- 2 C. chef’s choice marinara sauce
- ½ lb. elbow macaroni/mini shells or any small pasta



Combine and stir all ingredients except the pasta in your preferred cooking vessel (large Dutch oven, slow cooker or pressure cooker) and follow directions below for cooking.

Before serving, cook pasta per package directions for al dente (soft but not fully cooked). Drizzle some olive oil on it to avoid sticking and set aside. Add pasta to the rest of the stew 5 minutes prior to serving.

**Stovetop:** Cook mix over medium-high heat. Bring to a boil, stirring occasionally. Reduce heat to low and simmer uncovered for 35-45 minutes. Stir occasionally.

**Slow Cooker:** Cook on low 5-6 hours or high for 2-3 hours.

**Pressure Cooker:** Cook on high pressure for 18 minutes. When finished cooking, do a quick release.

Five minutes prior to serving, stir in the cooked pasta. Serve with bread and a sprinkle of Parmesan cheese on top.

### Family Style

*Mealtimes for families can be stressful on the best of days, and the expectations around the holidays only add to the pressure. Follow these tips and tricks to give yourself the best chance of success.*

**Helping Hands** - The pride that comes from being part of the process can’t be underestimated. Bookmark recipes and specific steps ahead of time that are age-appropriate for your youngster, like mashing potatoes or assembling desserts. HomeCooked even offers pie and cookie kits with easy-to-follow directions.

**Special Settings** - Another way to involve kids is by having them arrange a unique centerpiece using art or natural elements (branches, gourds and pinecones), or hand-drawn placemats and place cards. Older kids might enjoy creating napkin art using video tutorials.

**Taste Tests** - Experts say it can take 12 tries before kids will accept new food, so putting a food on the holiday table and expecting instant success may be a setup for disappointment. One strategy is to start making and trying foods in the weeks leading up to the holiday.

**New & Known** - One key to Thanksgiving (and really any meal) success is to have a few tried-and-true items paired with a few new items. That way, you know your kids will at least eat something, while also encouraging them to branch out a bit.

**Energy Out and In** - Make sure there’s a plan for all the kiddos to get out of the house and use up their energy before the big meal. Whether it’s a local turkey trot or a simple backyard game, getting that extra energy out will make for happier, hungrier little diners.

**Let It Be Light** - The most important thing we can do as parents and hosts of children is to tweak our expectations. Kids will be kids. There will be some “yucks,” and there may be some spills. The more these hiccups are expected and accepted, the less likely they are to ruin the meal.

### Slow-Cooker Buffalo Chicken Sandwiches with Blue Cheese Spread

*This is a perfect dish for times when you’re feeding a crowd, watching a game or just need an easy dinner!*

Serves 6

- 2 lbs. boneless and skinless chicken, breasts or thighs
- 1.5 C. hot sauce (we recommend Frank’s brand)
- 1 C. your favorite ranch dressing
- ¾ C. blue cheese crumbles
- 1 T. lemon juice
- ⅓ C. cream cheese, softened
- Dash of pepper
- 6 crusty rolls (hamburger or ciabatta style)





Combine the chicken, hot sauce and ranch dressing in your preferred cooking vessel — a large saucepan with a lid, slow cooker or pressure cooker.

**Stovetop:** Cook covered over low heat for 2–3 hours (the longer the better for more flavor and tenderness, and internal temperature of chicken should reach 165°).

**Slow Cooker:** Cook covered on low heat for 5–6 hours, making sure chicken reaches 165°.

**Pressure Cooker:** Cook on high pressure for 25 minutes then natural release.

Using two forks, pull the chicken apart into shreds.

**Blue Cheese Spread:**

In a small bowl, combine and stir together the blue cheese, lemon juice, cream cheese and pepper until thoroughly mixed.

Pile cooked, shredded chicken onto buns, making sure not to pick up too much liquid unless you like more heat. Spread the top half of the bun with the blue cheese spread. Enjoy.



**Raspberry Chipotle Pork Tenderloin**

*One of the best ways to enjoy eating at home is to try new recipes and keep things fresh. This sweet, spicy and scrumptious dinner checks all the boxes.*

Serves 4-5

- 1 T. olive oil
- 2 pork tenderloins, 10–12 oz. each, trimmed of fat
- 1 tsp. fresh garlic, diced
- 1 tsp. dried thyme
- ½ tsp. dried rosemary
- ½ tsp. salt
- ½ tsp. pepper
- ¾ C. seedless raspberry preserves
- 2 T. apple cider vinegar
- 1–2 tsp. pureed chipotle peppers in adobo sauce\*
- ¾ lb. egg noodles (cook and add butter for serving)
- Cooking spray

Preheat oven to 400°. Drizzle olive oil over the pork. Mix garlic, thyme, rosemary, salt and pepper in a small bowl. Massage the herb mix onto the tenderloins, and set aside.

In a small bowl, combine the preserves, apple cider vinegar and chipotle puree, and set aside.

Spray a baking dish with cooking spray. Lay the tenderloins flat in the dish. Bake in preheated oven for 10 minutes. Flip pork over and drizzle with half of the raspberry sauce. Cook for an additional 10–15 minutes, until reaching an internal temperature of 155°.

Let pork rest for 5 minutes and then slice it. Warm the remaining sauce and drizzle onto pork. Serve over buttered egg noodles. Enjoy with a green veggie.

\*Canned chipotle peppers in adobo can be found in a small can in the international grocery section. Puree or finely chop the peppers in the sauce for this recipe. Add 1 teaspoon for mild/moderate spice or 2 teaspoons for spicy! Store extra in your fridge or freeze in small portions.

**Chewy Ginger Cookies with Lemon Drizzle**

*Ginger cookies are an old holiday favorite, but the addition of the lemon drizzle and chopped candied ginger gives these a delightful zing. Make them as a family, or make the dough ahead of time and freeze it in a log for an easy slice-and-go option later.*

Makes 36

- 1 stick + 3 T. unsalted butter (¾ C.), softened
- 1 C. brown sugar
- 1 large egg
- ¼ C. molasses
- 2 tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- ¼ tsp. black pepper
- 2¾ C. all purpose flour
- ½ C. candied ginger, diced into small ¼" size pieces



**For the drizzle:**

- 1 C. powdered sugar
- Zest from ½ lemon (gives a fresh flavor punch!)
- 1 T. lemon juice
- 1 T. water

Preheat oven to 350°.

Cream butter and brown sugar until smooth. Add egg and molasses and mix.

Add baking soda, cinnamon, black pepper and flour and mix. Mix in diced candied ginger pieces until fully incorporated.

Spoon 1" balls of dough onto parchment-lined baking sheets, leaving 2" between each ball.

Bake cookies for 9–11 minutes. Let cookies rest for 2 minutes and then transfer them to a wire rack to cool.

**Make drizzle:** Combine powdered sugar, lemon zest and lemon juice, and stir with a fork. Add water a few drops at a time until the consistency becomes drizzle-like (a thin icing that's not runny). If too runny, add more powdered sugar.

Once cookies have cooled, drizzle the glaze over them, going back and forth in thin strips.

Store cookies in air-tight containers with wax paper in between layers. Dough can be frozen prior to baking for up to 2 months.

\*\*To freeze dough, either freeze as one large round (then simply thaw the whole thing to shape) or shape into small balls before freezing (which allows you to do a few at a time if you'd like). Either way works, just make sure the dough has been allowed to thaw for 10–15 minutes before baking.



*Alyssa Thayer found her love of food at an early age, frolicking around her mother's organic farm and eating her weight in berries and snap peas each summer. She is a self-proclaimed urban farm girl, whose mission is to bring inspired ideas to life, passionate people together, and good food to every table.*

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