

Lauren's Latest
CHRISTMAS MAGAZINE

2019





From the Author

Hello sweet friends and Happy Holidays! Whether you are a brand new Lauren's Latest groupie or you've been around these parts a while, welcome to my second Christmas digital magazine, made specifically for you in mind. Holidays can be tough, exhausting and *not that fun*, especially if you happen to be a mom in charge of all.the.things.

Whether you are trying to simplify your upcoming parties, try a new recipe for Christmas breakfast or amp up your holiday dinner, I've got you covered. All the recipes in this e-book are delicious, easy and most importantly family-approved. No matter how busy we all get, know that I've got your culinary back. We got this!

Merry Christmas,

Lauren

Christmas Breakfast

I don't know about you but I get stuck in a Christmas Breakfast rut. I love delicious food, but I have a hard time either finding the time or deciding on a menu that is 'special enough'. This year, I decided to do a little bit of everything. Food my family all enjoys that I rarely make on any given day.

Delicious and buttery Scones! Baked eggs and bacon! German Pancakes! Breakfast Strata! Roasted Potatoes! The gang is all here.

This menu is a mix between the make ahead and the quick and simple. Make one recipe or make them all. Regardless, it's going to be a delicious addition to your breakfast table this year.





Breakfast Strata

prep time: 2 hours, 20 minutes | cook time: 45 minutes | total time: 3 hours, 5 minutes | serves: 6

8 cups cubed ciabatta bread (½ Costco loaf)
1 cup milk
7 large eggs
salt & pepper, to taste
8 oz. breakfast sausage, cooked and crumbled
5 basil leaves, chopped
2 roasted red peppers, chopped
4 oz. grated white cheddar cheese

Place cubed bread into the bottom of a greased casserole dish.

In a large bowl, whisk milk, eggs, salt and pepper, breakfast sausage and roasted red peppers together. Pour ovetop ciabatta and press down to soak.

Top with cheddar cheese, cover with foil and refrigerate 2 hours to overnight.

Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes. Cool 10 minutes before cutting and serving. Top with more fresh basil.

German Pancakes

prep time: 10 minutes | cook time: 20 minutes | total time: 30 minutes | serves: 4

¾ cup milk
2 large eggs
pinch of salt
½ cup all purpose flour
1 ½ teaspoons sugar
½ teaspoon vanilla
2 tablespoons salted butter

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Preheat cast iron skillet over medium heat.

In a blender or large bowl, stir together milk, eggs, salt, flour, sugar and vanilla until smooth.

Melt butter in hot cast iron skillet and brush to cover bottom and sides with butter. Pour in batter to hot skillet, then transfer to preheated oven immediately. Bake 20 minutes or until puffed and golden.

Serve immediately with any desired toppings: powdered sugar, raspberries, syrup, etc.





Roasted Potatoes

prep time: 10 minutes | cook time: 30 minutes | total time: 40 minutes | serves: 4

3 tablespoons olive oil

**1 lb. baby potatoes,
washed and dried**

salt & pepper, to taste

**½ teaspoon onion
powder**

**½ teaspoon garlic
powder**

½ teaspoon fresh thyme

½ teaspoon paprika

In a large bowl, toss potatoes together with olive oil and seasonings.

Place onto a parchment paper lined baking pan and bake at 400 degrees for 20-30 minutes or until soft. Serve warm.

Note: if your potatoes tend to vary in size, cut larger potatoes into smaller pieces so they are all relatively the same size.

Buttery Cinnamon Scones

prep time: 15 minutes | cook time: 25 minutes | total time: 40 minutes | serves: 8

2 cups all purpose flour
2 tablespoons
 granulated sugar
1 teaspoon baking
 powder
½ teaspoon salt
12 tablespoons cold
 salted butter
2 large eggs
½ cup heavy cream
½ cup cinnamon chips
1 tablespoon milk

glaze

2 tablespoons melted
 butter
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 tablespoon milk
1 ½ cups powdered
 sugar
cinnamon, to taste

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Line one light colored baking sheet with parchment paper and set aside.

Combine flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt in a large bowl. Blend in the cold butter using a pastry cutter until the butter is in pea-sized pieces.

Combine the eggs and heavy cream in a separate bowl and quickly add to the flour/butter mixture along with the cinnamon chips. Combine until just blended. The dough will be slightly sticky.

Dump the dough out onto a floured surface and be sure it is well combined. Flour your hands, the top of the dough and a rolling pin. Roll the dough out to 1-inch to 1 1/4-inch thick. Using a knife or cookie cutter, cut into 4-inch squares and then in half diagonally to create triangles.

Place on prepared baking sheet. Brush tops of scones with milk. Bake 20 to 25 minutes or until the tops are golden and crisp.

For the glaze: whisk melted butter together with vanilla, milk, powdered sugar and cinnamon until thick and smooth. Drizzle over baked scones and serve.





Baked Parmesan Eggs & Bacon

prep time: 7 minutes | cook time: 20 minutes | total time: 27 minutes | serves: 6

**12 slices store bought
pre-cooked bacon**
12 large eggs
salt & pepper, to taste
**4 tablespoons grated
parmesan cheese**
**2 tablespoons chopped
fresh chives**

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Spray muffin tin well with nonstick cooking spray.

Line the edges of each muffin tin with 1 slice of precooked bacon. Crack one egg into each muffin tin. Top with salt, pepper and 1 teaspoon of parmesan cheese each.

Bake 15-20 minutes or until the yolk is cooked to your liking. Top with chives and serve.

Holiday Parties

- MADE EASY -

I am the queen of last minute things. School lunches? Doctor appointments? Work deadlines? I get it all done, but usually it's because I'm flying at the seat of my pants. Having four kids will do that to ya!

In this article, I'm sharing all my delicious tips and tricks to creating a memorable party that doesn't take much effort or time. Make a shopping list, let the store do the majority of the work and watch things just fall into place!

With the exception of a few recipes in this section (hiii baked onion dip) the rest of the items are just ideas that you can have in the back of your mind for all your last minute needs.





Baked Onion Dip

prep time: 10 minutes | cook time: 50 minutes | total time: 1 hour | serves: 10

4 tablespoons butter
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 large sweet onions
(maui, vidalia)
4 oz. cream cheese,
softened
1 cup sour cream
8 oz. grated gruyere
cheese
1 teaspoon onion
powder
salt & pepper, to taste

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Lightly spray a small casserole dish, large ramekin or any oven-safe small dish with nonstick cooking spray and set aside.

In a large skillet, heat butter and olive oil over medium heat. Peel and dice onions. Cook to brown and caramelize all onions, about 20 minutes. If they are browning too quickly, reduce heat.

In a large bowl, stir cooked onions together with cream cheese, sour cream, gruyere cheese, onion powder, salt and pepper. Pour into prepared dish and bake uncovered for 30 minutes or until bubbly and very brown.

Serve hot with ruffles chips, crackers and veggie slices.

Buffalo Chicken Turkey Meatballs

prep time: 5 minutes | cook time: 20 minutes | total time: 25 minutes | serves: 8

1-25 oz. package frozen

Turkey Meatballs

¼ cup water

¼ cup butter

**½ cup hot sauce + more
for garnish**

**¼ cup blue cheese
crumbles**

In a large cast iron skillet, heat meatballs and water to defrost completely. Add more water in as needed. Add in butter and hot sauce and melt together to coat meatballs.

Stack into serving dish, top with blue cheese crumbles and serve alongside blue cheese dressing, celery sticks and carrots.





Rosemary Roasted Nuts

prep time: 5 minutes | cook time: 8 minutes | total time: 13 minutes | serves: 8

**1-15 oz. can Mixed Nuts
(such as Plantar's)**

**2 tablespoons melted
butter**

**1 teaspoon sea salt
(such as Maldon)**

**1 tablespoon brown
sugar**

**1 teaspoon freshly
chopped rosemary**

In a large bowl, toss nuts together with butter, salt, sugar and rosemary. Place onto baking sheet and bake at 375 degrees for 5 minutes. Remove from oven and toss.

Bake another 3 minutes. Remove from oven, cool and spoon into serving dish

Fancy Hummus

prep time: 5 minutes | cook time: 0 minutes | total time: 5 minutes | serves: 8

- 1 container hummus (any flavor is fine!)**
- 2 tablespoons olive oil**
- pepper, to taste**
- 2 tablespoons chopped parsley**
- 2 tablespoons pine nuts**

Spoon pre-made hummus onto small serving plate or bowl. Using the back of a spoon, add a few swirls to the hummus.

Drizzle with olive oil and top with pepper, parsley and pine nuts.

Serve with pita chips or veggies.



Absolutely No Time? No Problem!

Here are 8 more ideas that only require a trip to the store:

1. Cheese board: grab a few different kinds of cheeses and crackers. Throw on a few nuts or pieces of fruit as a bonus.
2. Shrimp Cocktail: all that is required is defrosting. Toss the shrimp in a little parsley and add a few lemon wedges for a beautiful presentation. Don't forget the cocktail sauce!
3. Marinated olives and cheese: grab 2-3 kinds of olives from the store along with some fresh mozzarella balls. Drain olives and cheese and toss together with olive oil, basil, oregano and red pepper flakes.
4. Store-bought mini quiches. These little guys pop up in the freezer section in November and December! Serve over a bed of arugula for beautiful presentation.
5. Find some Spinach and Artichoke Dip (or really any hearty dip) in the deli section, spread into the bottom of a casserole dish, top with parmesan cheese and bake. Serve with chips or veggies.
6. Grab some ricotta cheese and blend until very smooth. (Use a little heavy cream to get it going, if needed.) Spoon thick and smooth ricotta onto a serving dish and drizzle with honey and truffle oil. Top with toasted almonds and serve with french bread.
7. Buy a big ball of burrata cheese, top with store-bought pesto and serve with french bread.
8. When in doubt, find yourself a cheeseball. I'm looking at you, Kaukauna.





Goodbye 2019... Hello 2020!

Man oh man, another year for the books! This year did not disappoint when it came to surprises, adventures and another move. (What else is new!)

January opened with a bang as I learned that I was pregnant with our fourth baby the morning of Eddie's third birthday!

Gordon and I wanted to grow our family, but things just weren't working out and by the end of 2018, we had given up with that darn fertility medicine that helped get our first two boys here. So for this little jelly bean to pop up in January was a welcome blessing and miracle we were so grateful for. No morning sickness whatsoever, just a little exhaustion here and there with a burgeoning belly.

In February, we cruised into the Bahamas and thoroughly enjoyed our time away from the NYC wind and cold. It was just what the doctor ordered. Brooke also turned ten! We started looking for new apartments as well because we didn't want to see if all six of us could fit into a 2-bedroom apartment and I figured I'd rather move before baby than after.

March was relatively uneventful, being filled with ultrasounds, blood work and genetic testing. We learned we were expecting a boy and shared the happy news with our families. A few of you left comments guessing if I was pregnant which I left unanswered.







April we announced the happy news that we were expecting another little Brennan baby and man oh man were we surrounded with love. (Thank you!!) Blake also turned 6 and we moved into our spacious 4-bedroom apartment...for New York standards. Ha! We had the opportunity to travel back to Oregon to visit Gordon's family for Easter which was so lovely. Even though we love and miss living in the Pacific Northwest, we are very aware of how lucky we are to be able to live in New York.

In May, two of my best friends came to New York for a visit and we had the funnest long weekend in the city! I loved showing them around and being able to navigate the city like a pro. I actually FELT like a pro, saying "we should take this subway train here because it would be fastest" or "we should go at this time because it won't be busy." etc. etc... It's taken me a while to come around to this whole city-living thing, but now that we are here, I'm coming to really like it.

June marked the end of our kids' school years and summer vacation! My doctor wanted me staying close to home since I was in my last trimester, so we went to visit my parents in July and up to Maine in August with a little staycation thrown into the middle for Gordon's birthday.





September was the month we were waiting for! School started for all three of my kids (Brooke in 5th grade, Blake in 1st grade and Eddie in a 3-day/week preschool.) and our baby boy, Porter, was born! He has turned out to be a really calm and chill baby and for that I'm grateful. But I suppose when you're the youngest of 4, you have to go with the flow. His demeanor suits our family well and think he is absolutely delicious in every way.

We had family come visit the new baby into October and help with the older children so I could sleep when the baby slept and that was such a huge help. After six weeks when all my help left, I was able to ease into a new routine and am still surviving somehow on very little sleep. Four kids is no joke (so much work!) but we are making it work and Porter being such a great little predictable human is the main reason why.

November brought cooler temperatures and a last minute Thanksgiving trip for me and the kids to Arizona. I'm learning that my family likes warm places. Ha! Lots of sister time, cousin time and delicious food comas for all!

December will get kicked into high gear with us in full-on holiday mode! Christmas, my birthday and New Years all wrapped up into one very festive week. I say bring on the holidays! While I have loved everything that has happened in 2019, I am ready to continue to watch my sweet family grow in 2020 here in the heart of New York City.

Warmest Seasons Greetings, friends! xo



Merry Christmas, friends!





SIMPLE *Christmas* DINNER

I love Christmas. It's my favorite holiday, mainly because of the food. Every year I have big, fancy plans that always get sidelined because I'm the Mom (in charge of everything) and some things just have to give.

For this Christmas menu, I opted for ease. Super simple? Yes! Also super delicious? YES! With not a lot of prep time for anything, you can be in and out of the kitchen in no time and actually enjoy your holiday.

The roast beef and mashed potatoes are only as good as the gravy and by golly this gravy recipe is a good one, featuring strong beefy flavors with a hint of thyme and garlic. The rolls are store bought with copious amounts of honey butter up on top to fancy them up and steamed carrots are always a welcome (read: easy!) addition. Finish it off with a No-Bake Chocolate Candy Cane Cheesecake that can be made days ahead and that makes for a fabulous and memorable holiday meal.

Roast Beef

prep time: 25 minutes | cook time: 2 hours | total time: 2 hours, 25 minutes | serves: 4-6

**1 eye of Round Beef
Roast (2-3 lbs or
larger if serving a
crowd)**

**olive oil
salt, to taste**

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Tie roast with kitchen twine. Pat dry with paper towels, rub with olive oil and sprinkle liberally with salt.

Place onto roasting rack (or small cooling rack set into a baking dish) and bake for 30 minutes. Reduce heat to 300 degrees for another 30-50 minutes more or until internal temperature reaches desired doneness:

Rare: 115 to 120 degrees F

Medium Rare: 120 to 125 degrees F

Medium: 130 to 135 degrees F

Medium Well: 140 to 145 degrees F

Well: 150 to 155 degrees F

Remove from oven, transfer to plate or cutting board, tent with foil and rest for 15 minutes. Pour off any drippings to save for gravy, slice thinly and cover with foil to keep warm.





Honey Glazed Carrots with Parsley

prep time: 10 minutes | cook time: 15 minutes | total time: 25 minutes | serves: 4-6

1 ½ lbs. fresh carrots
cold water
salt, to taste
2 tablespoons salted
butter
3 tablespoons honey
chopped parsley or
chives, for garnish

Place carrots into a large skillet with high sides. Fill a pan with enough cold water to mostly cover the carrots. Sprinkle with salt, cover and bring to boil. Reduce heat and simmer with the lid still on until carrots are fork tender (but not falling apart tender), 12-15 minutes.

Drain and place carrots back into the hot pan. Place the pan over medium heat and add in butter and honey. Cook 2-3 minutes or until all carrots are glazed with melted butter and honey.

Top with any garnishes and serve warm.

Soft Rolls with Honey Butter

prep time: 10 minutes | cook time: 15 minutes | total time: 25 minutes | serves: 4-6

1-11 oz. package
Parker House Rolls
(Sister Schubert
Brand*)
¼ cup salted butter,
softened
¼ cup honey
1 teaspoon cinnamon
(optional)

Warm rolls according to package directions. In a small bowl, stir butter, honey and cinnamon together until smooth. Generously top warm rolls with honey butter and serve.

*if you can't find this brand, use either a homemade roll recipe or defrost and bake a pan of Rhodes rolls according to the package directions.





Thyme & Garlic Gravy

*prep time: 2 minutes | cook time: 10 minutes | total time: 12 minutes |
yields: 2 cups of gravy*

2 tablespoons butter
2 tablespoons flour
**2 cups beef drippings +
beef consomee***
2 sprigs fresh thyme
1 clove garlic, crushed

Melt butter in small saucepan over medium heat. Whisk in flour to create a paste. Cook 1 minute. Slowly whisk in beef drippings and consomee to create a smooth gravy. Bring to boil and reduce to a light simmer.

Add in thyme sprigs and crushed garlic clove. Keep warm, stirring occasionally, until ready to use. Remove thyme sprigs and garlic before serving. The longer the thyme and garlic sits in the gravy, the stronger the taste. Remove the garlic and thyme when you like the flavor profile.

*you want 2 cups total of liquid. Pour off drippings into a measuring cup and skim any fat. Pour in enough beef consomee to have a total of 2 cups.

Chive Mashed Potatoes

prep time: 20 minutes | cook time: 20 minutes | total time: 40 minutes | serves: 6

2 lbs. Idaho potatoes
4 tablespoons salted butter
½ cup sour cream
½ -1 cup whole milk
salt & pepper, to taste
4 tablespoons chopped fresh chives, divided

Peel potatoes and rinse them. Cut into even-sized pieces and place them into a large pot. Cover with water and add a dash of salt. Bring to boil, then reduce to simmer. Cook until fork-tender, about 20 minutes. Drain completely and place potatoes back into the hot pot.

Mash potatoes with butter, sour cream, milk, salt and pepper until desired consistency has been reached. Fold in 3 tablespoons chives and spoon into serving dish. Top with remaining chives and extra pats of butter (optional). Serve warm with gravy.





Christmas Salad

prep time: 10 minutes | cook time: 0 minutes | total time: 10 minutes | serves: 6

- 1-5 oz. clamshell mixed butter lettuce**
- 1 large honeycrisp apple, sliced**
- ½ cup candied pecans**
- ½ cup parmesan crisps (such as whisps brand)**
- ¼ cup red onion, thinly sliced**

dressing

- 1 tablespoon honey**
- 1 tablespoon dijon mustard**
- 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar**
- 4 tablespoons grapeseed oil**
- salt & pepper, to taste**

Place lettuce into a large bowl and top with apple, nuts, parmesan crisps and onion.

For the dressing, whisk honey, dijon mustard and balsamic vinegar together until smooth. Whisk in grapeseed oil until thick. Season with salt and pepper.

Toss salad with dressing before serving, or serve dressing beside.





Buttery Spritz Cookies

*prep time: 20 minutes | cook time: 8 minutes | total time: 28 minutes |
yields: 6 dozen cookies*

**1 cup salted butter,
softened**

½ cup granulated sugar

½ cup powdered sugar

1 large egg

**1 teaspoon almond
extract (optional)**

**1 teaspoon vanilla
extract**

**2 ¼ cups all purpose
flour**

**sprinkles for garnish, if
desired**

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Mix butter, granulated sugar and powdered sugar together on medium speed until mixed well. Stir in egg, almond extract and vanilla extract. Slowly incorporate flour-stir until just combined.

Place dough into cookie press. Form desired shapes on a lightly colored, ungreased baking sheet. Decorate if desired with sprinkles.

Bake 5 to 8 minutes until set but not brown. Cool 1-2 minutes and remove from baking sheet.

No-Bake Chocolate Candy Cane Cheesecake

prep time: 3 hours, 30 minutes | cook time: 8 minutes | total time: 3 hours, 38 minutes | serves: 12

crust

24 Oreo cookies
1/3 cup salted butter, melted

filling

3-8 oz. packages cream cheese, at room temperature
1 cup granulated sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla
1/2 cup unsweetened cocoa powder (such as Hershey's)
1 cup heavy cream

chocolate ganache topping

1/2 cup heavy cream
7 oz. good quality milk chocolate, chopped

whipped cream decorations

1 cup heavy cream
4 tablespoons powdered sugar
1 teaspoon cornstarch
1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla
1 teaspoon peppermint extract
4 candy canes, crushed

For the crust: In a blender or food processor, crush Oreo cookies into fine crumbs. Stir together with melted butter and press into the bottom of an 8 or 9-inch springform pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 8 minutes. Cool and set aside.

For the filling: In the bowl of a stand mixer, stir cream cheese, sugar and vanilla together until smooth and creamy. Add in cocoa and incorporate on low speed. Scrape the sides of the bowl and mix again to ensure a completely smooth batter. With the mixer on low speed, slowly stream in heavy cream. Once it has all been incorporated, increase mixer speed to high and whip 30 seconds to 1 minutes or until filling is very thick and easily holds its shape. Spoon into prepared crust and smooth the top. Refrigerate 3 hours to overnight.

For the chocolate ganache topping: Heat cream in microwave until very hot and steamy. Pour over chopped chocolate and sit 1 minute. Stir together until smooth and shiny.

Run a sharp knife around the edges of the cheesecake and remove ring. Place cheesecake onto serving platter. Spoon chocolate ganache around the top of the cheesecake to smooth and spread to the edges, allowing it to drip down.

For the whipped cream decorations: whip heavy cream together with powdered sugar, cornstarch, vanilla and peppermint extract until stiff peaks form. Spoon into a piping bag fitted with a 1M (large star) piping tip. Pipe cream florets around the top of cake as decoration.

Top with crushed candy canes and serve.



To my lovely and kind Lauren's Latest readers who have been with me for the last 10 years and counting: THANK YOU! Thank you for your support, your sweet comments, your thoughtful emails, your social media shares and your generosity towards me and my family. You are the reason this has become my career. You are the reason I get to spend my days in my kitchen experimenting and dreaming up weird and wonderful recipes.

Not a day goes by that I am not thankful for you!

In 2020, I hope to give you all more family-friendly, simple and delicious recipes as well as family posts that make so many of you smile.

Much love,

Lauren & Family

(Gordon, Brooke, Blake, Eddie & Porter)

