

Appetizers and Salads



Cod Fish Fritters

Frituras de Bacalao

Serves 4 to 5 (4 fritters each)

1 lb. salted cod fish, dry packed
½ medium onion, chopped
¼ green bell pepper, chopped
3 tbsp. parsley, finely chopped
1 cup flour
1 egg
½ tsp. baking powder or soda
Dash black pepper
Cooking oil enough to fry



Soak the cod fish in water for about 15 minutes. Discard the water and soak fish for one more hour in fresh water. Save ½ cup of the salted fish water for later in the recipe, and discard the rest. Put fresh water in a pot, and boil the cod fish over medium heat until tender (about 35 minutes). Let cool and drain. In a food processor, place the onions, green pepper, and parsley, and chop until almost pureed. Shred the fish, add the puree from the food processor and the flour, wetting it with the salted water as necessary. Mix in the egg, baking powder, olive oil, and black pepper. Blend everything with a fork or spoon. Shape the fritters with a spoon and fry them in hot oil (350 degrees), until golden brown. Place in paper towels to drain excess oil, and serve.

Note: For flatter and “meatier” fritters, do not use baking powder.

Variation: Beef Fritters

Follow the recipe above, but replace the cod fish with ¾ lb. fresh, lean ground beef; omit the baking powder and the tbsp. of olive oil; and reduce the flour to ½ cup only. All the other ingredients remain the same. In the preparation process, place the fresh, ground beef (uncooked) in a large bowl, and add the puree from the mini food processor, the egg, the flour, black pepper, and 1 tsp. of salt. Mix well by hand, then form the fritter patties. Fry them as indicated in the recipe above.



Tuna Loaf

Salpicon de Tuna

This is a wonderful party dish, which can be prepared a day or two ahead of time.

Serves 6 to 8

1 small onion, cut in chunks
1 egg
1 can red pimientos with liquid
(7 oz.)
3 cans solid white tuna (7 oz.
each)
3 slices bread, soaked in milk
1 tbsp. tomato puree or paste
Salt to taste
Dash cumin powder
Dash black pepper
¾ cup cracker meal
Pimento-stuffed olives, cut in half
(for garnish)
Sliced red pimientos (for garnish)
Mayonnaise (for garnish)

In a food processor, chop the onions, egg, and can of red pimientos. Transfer to a large bowl. Drain the tuna and place in food processor; add the bread soaked in milk, tomato puree or paste, and the spices. Remember, tuna is already salted. Blend until smooth. Mix with the puree in the bowl. Add the cracker meal to give it consistency. Bake in a greased, glass loaf pan, in a 350 degree oven for about 50 minutes, or until a knife comes out clean when inserted in the center. Let cool, and invert on a serving tray. Cover with mayonnaise and decorate with sliced pimento-stuffed olives and red pimientos, inserting them into the mayonnaise. Refrigerate before serving. Serve with crackers.



Portabella and Shrimp-Filled Pastries

Camarones/Portabella en Hojaldre

Serves 6

1 box frozen pastry baskets (6 pastries)
4 tbsp. (½ stick) unsalted butter
½ red onion, chopped
5 large cloves garlic, mashed
¾ cup Portabella mushrooms, sliced and cut in half
½ lb. shrimp, peeled and cleaned
Dash dry oregano
1 tsp. salt
Dash freshly ground black pepper
¼ cup dry sherry (more if needed)
1 tbsp. flour
¼ cup milk (more if needed)

Bake pastries following directions on the package. In a large skillet, melt the butter and sauté the onion, garlic, and mushrooms for about 1 minute. Add the shrimp, seasonings, and the sherry. Cook for about 5 minutes, turning constantly with a wooden spatula. Add the flour, and keep turning to dissolve it. Add the milk, a little at a time, to smooth out the mixture, and remove from the heat. Fill each pastry and replace the “lid.” Any extra shrimp and mushroom mix can be served next to the pastry shells.

Variation: Spinach Filling

3 tbsp. unsalted butter
3 tbsp. chopped onions
1 heaping tbsps. flour
1 cup milk
Dash white pepper
Dash salt, to taste
2 cups steamed spinach, chopped

Bake pastries as directed on package. In a medium sauce pot, melt the butter and sauté the onions. Add the flour and stir until it separates from the sides. Add the milk, white pepper, and salt to taste. Keep stirring until smooth and thick. Remove from the heat and add the spinach, mixing everything well. Fill each pastry shell with the mixture, and replace the lid.



Ground Corn Wrap with Pork Filling

Tamal En Hoja

The main ingredient, “ground, young, tender corn” is available in the U.S. in cities where there is a large Cuban population in “natural fruit stores” (*fruterias*). You can also buy young, tender corn and grind it at home.

Yields 8 to 10 tamales

3 tbsp. cooking oil (or pork lard)
1 large onion, finely chopped
¼ green and red bell peppers,
finely chopped
5 large garlic cloves, mashed
1 lb. lean pork, cut in small cubes
2 tbsp. tomato puree (or paste)
2 tsp. salt (more might be needed)
¼ tsp. cumin powder
Dash oregano
Dash crushed red pepper
¼ cup red wine or cooking wine
2 lbs. ground, young, tender
corn (*maiz tierno*)
8 to 10 maize wraps (fresh or
dry). Heavy aluminum foil can
be used instead.*

In a large (4 or 6 qt.) saucepot, heat the oil, and sauté the onions, bell peppers, garlic, and the pork meat for approximately 2 minutes, turning constantly and cooking the meat on all sides. Add the tomato puree, the salt, and the spices. Add the wine, and reduce the heat to “low.” Cover and cook for approximately 30 minutes, or until the meat is tender.

Place the ground corn in a large bowl. Stir in a tsp. of salt. Take one corn wrap, with one end folded, and fill it with the corn mixture, leaving some space in the top. Open the center with a knife or finger, and fill it with the pork mixture. Add a little more corn at the end, and place another wrap on top to close. Tie the wrapped tamal with a cooking string or cord across and lengthwise. Fill a large stock pot halfway with water, add approximately 3 tbsp. of salt, and bring the water to a boil. Place the wrapped “tamales” in the boiling water, and cook in medium/high heat, for about 45 minutes. Drain and cut the strings to serve.

*If unable to use real corn wraps to make the tamales, make a rectangular wrap with heavy aluminum foil, by folding the sides several times to avoid opening while boiling. Fold three sides leaving the top open to fill, then fold the end 2 to 3 times to close the tamal. It should measure approximately 5 inches long, by 2 ½ inches wide.

Variation: Easy Preparation

When the pork is cooked, mix the ground corn with the meat. Fill the wraps all the way up with the corn/pork mixture. This easier version is more commonly used.



Stuffed Potatoes

Papa Rellena

Serves 6 to 8

6 to 8 large potatoes, peeled and cut in chunks

1 tbsp. salt

1 lb. *Picadillo* (cooked ground beef; recipe found in the Pork, Beef, and Other Meats section)

1 or 2 eggs, beaten

Cracker meal for breading

Cooking oil to deep fry

Boil potatoes in water and salt until tender. Drain and mash without adding anything else. The mashed potatoes should be heavy in texture. With clean hands, shape the mashed potatoes into 3-inch balls. Poke a hole with your thumb in one side of the ball, and stuff it with 1 tbsp. of *picadillo*. Cover the hole with more mashed potatoes, and shape it, packing it well. Pass the balls through the beaten eggs first, then through the cracker meal. Fry them in enough hot oil to almost cover them. Be careful when turning them, because they can separate if not handled with care. Place on paper towels to soak up excess oil, and serve warm.



Ham or Chicken Croquettes

Croquetas de Jamon/Pollo

This popular Cuban treat is always present at birthday parties and all family gatherings. Children of all ages love *croquetas*.

Yields 16 to 20 croquettes

Béchamel Sauce

3 tbsp. butter
2 tbsp. finely chopped onion
3 heaping tbsp. flour (about ½ cup)
1 cup milk
½ tsp. salt
Dash white pepper

Ham or Chicken Croquettes

2 lbs. ground ham or ground, boiled chicken breast
4 tbsp. finely chopped parsley
Dash garlic salt
Prepared béchamel sauce
2 eggs, beaten
Cracker meal or breadcrumbs
Cooking oil to deep fry

To prepare **Béchamel Sauce**, in small pot, melt the butter and sauté the onion briefly. Add the flour at once and turn constantly until the mixture forms into a ball. Add the milk and salt and pepper; keep turning until it thickens. This béchamel should have a very thick consistency, because it is to be combined with the ground meat to form the croquettes.

To prepare **Ham or Chicken Croquettes**, mix the first 4 ingredients in a large bowl. Shape them into croquettes (about 3-inch-long by 1-inch-thick cylinders). Pass each croquette through the beaten egg mixture and then through the cracker meal. Deep fry them in hot oil until golden brown. Place in paper towels to soak up excess oil.

Note: For thicker and crispier breading, pass the croquettes through the cracker meal first, then the egg, and then through the cracker meal again.

Variation: Cheese Croquettes

Follow the recipe above, replacing the 2 lbs. of ground ham with 1 ½ lbs. shredded, light-yellow cheese (such as Gouda, brick, or provolone). Everything else in the recipe stays the same.

Potato Croquettes

Croquetas de Papas

These croquettes are a favorite of many children. Great as a snack or lunch.

Yields 6 to 8 croquettes

Béchamel Sauce

2 tbsp. butter
3 generous tbsp. flour
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup milk
Dash salt and white pepper

Potato Croquettes

2 lbs. potatoes, peeled
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup shredded yellow cheese
(Gouda, Swiss, or Gruyere are best)
3 egg yolks
3 tbsp. finely chopped parsley
Dash salt and white pepper
Prepared béchamel sauce
2 eggs, beaten
Cracker meal or breadcrumbs
Cooking oil for deep frying

To prepare **Béchamel Sauce**, melt the butter in a small pot. Add the flour at once and turn constantly until the mixture forms into a ball. Add the milk and the salt and pepper; keep turning until it thickens. This Béchamel should have a very thick consistency because it is to be combined with the other ingredients to form the croquettes.

To prepare **Potato Croquettes**, cut the potatoes into chunks, and boil in salted water until tender (about 20 minutes). Drain the potatoes and place them in a large bowl. Mash them without adding any water. Mix in the rest of the ingredients, and blend together completely.

Shape this mixture into croquettes (about 3-inch-long by 1-inch-thick cylinder). If the mixture is too soft to shape, place in the refrigerator for a couple of hours and try again. Pass each croquette through the cracker meal, then through the beaten egg mixture, and back through the cracker meal again. Deep fry them in hot oil until golden brown. Place in paper towels to soak up excess oil.

Tuna in Tomato Sauce

Fritada de Tuna

This is a quick and delicious appetizer to accompany your favorite drinks and to share with friends!

Serves 6 (approximately)

3 to 4 tbsp. olive oil

½ medium onion, cut in slices

3 tbsp. tomato paste

3 cans tuna, drained (6 oz. each)

Dash oregano

Dash cumin powder

Dash black pepper

¼ cup cooking wine or dry white
wine

In a large skillet, heat the oil and add the onion slices. Sauté, turning a few times. Add the tomato paste and the tuna, and sauté while flaking the meat. Add the spices and the wine, and keep cooking for about 3 to 4 minutes or until the wine has almost evaporated. Keep turning while cooking to prevent sticking. Can be served hot or cold. Serve with crackers.

Ham and Cream Cheese Rolls

Rollitos de Jamon

Yields 16 to 18 rolls

1 lb. sliced ham

**1 softened cream cheese or Neuf-
châtel (8 oz.)**

1 to 1½ cup pitted dates or prunes

Spread cream cheese on each slice of ham (the slices can be cut in half lengthwise), place 1 date (or prune) on slice, and roll the ham. Place a toothpick through the roll to hold in place, and chill.

Five-Layer Bean Dip

Entremes En Cinco Capas

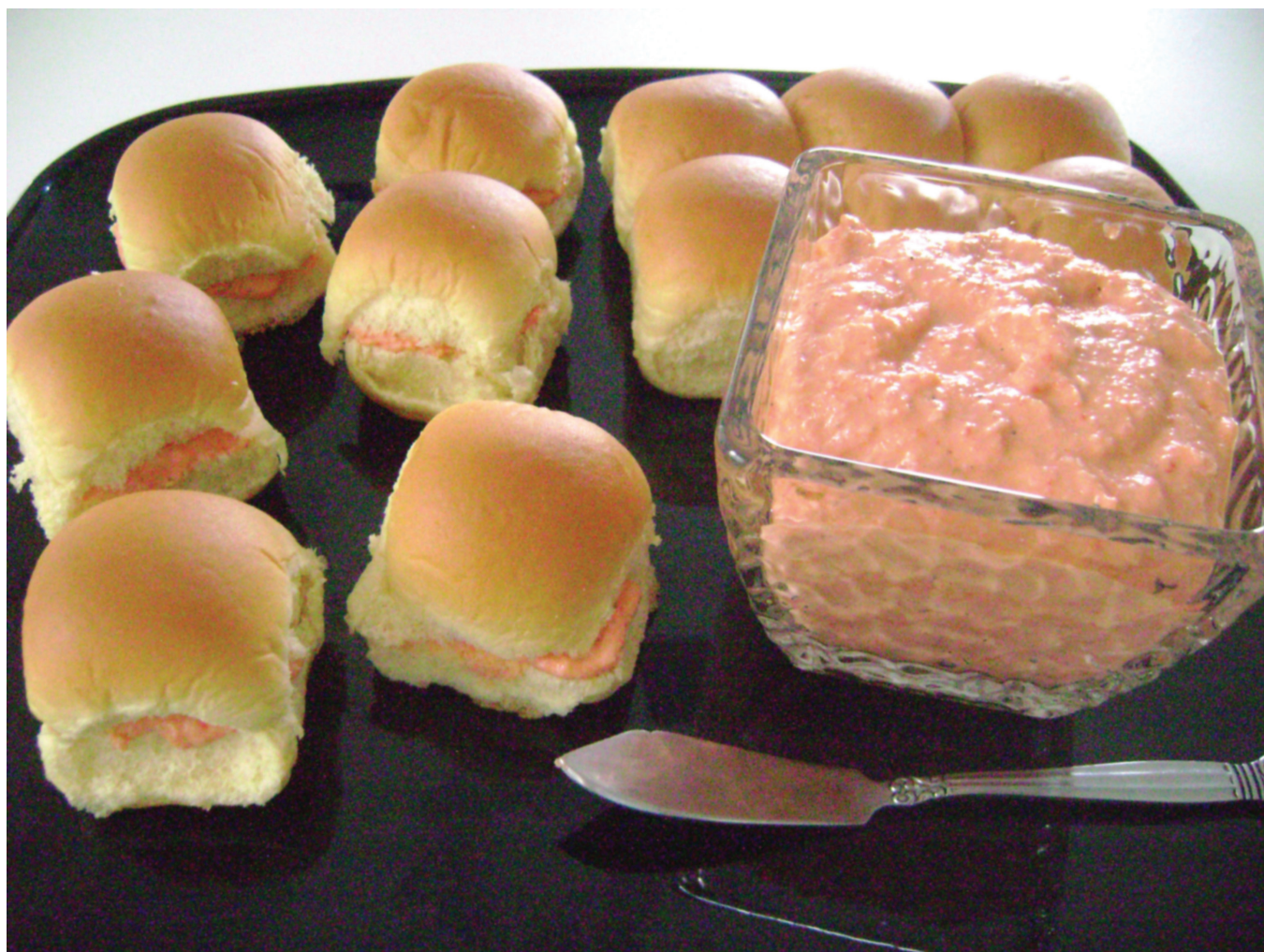
This is another party favorite. Serve with tortilla or corn chips.

Serves 6 (approximately)

- 2 large cream cheeses or Neuf-châtel (8 oz. each)
- 1 cup sliced black olives
- 1 large can refried beans, Mexican style (15 oz.)
- 2 cups chunky tomato salsa, Mexican style
- 1 lb. shredded blend of four Mexican cheeses

In a medium glass pan (8" by 8" or similar), spread the cream cheese to cover the bottom of the dish. Follow with the black olive slices, the refried beans, and the salsa. Lastly, sprinkle with the shredded cheeses. Bake in 350 degree oven until the cheese melts. Serve warm. If the cheese gets hard, reheat as needed.

Note: Dip can be reheated in a microwave.



Sandwich Spread

Pasta de Bocaditos

This is the traditional spread used to fill the tiny buns, called *bocaditos*, served at every Cuban birthday party.

Serves 10 to 12

1 lb. ground ham

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup deviled ham

8 oz. cream cheese (I prefer Neuf-châtel)

1 can red pimentos in liquid (7 oz.)

Place all the ingredients, including the liquid from the pimentos, in a food processor and blend until smooth. Use the spread to fill small buns, Hawaiian rolls, or any other soft bun. You can also fill 2 white bread slices, peeling the outer rim, and cutting the sandwiches in half diagonally. This is a children's favorite.

Cold Meat

Carne Fria

This is a very versatile dish. It can be prepared far in advance, and refrigerated until needed. It is great to take to the beach, picnic, or a party.

Serves 10 to 12

1 onion, cut in chunks
4 garlic cloves, peeled
¼ green or red bell pepper
3 slices bread, soaked in evaporated milk
1 lb. ground ham
1 lb. lean ground beef (or ½ lb. pork and ½ lb. beef)
1 tsp. salt
¼ tsp. cumin powder
Dash black pepper
2 eggs, plus 1 beaten egg for breading
Cracker meal

Put the onions, garlic, bell pepper, eggs, and the bread soaked in milk in a blender. Blend at a low speed until smooth. Place the ground meats in a large bowl, and pour the mixture onto it. Add the salt, cumin, and black pepper. Knead with your hands thoroughly while sprinkling in cracker meal to give it consistency. Form into a 8" x 2" roll. Pass the roll through the beaten egg, then through the cracker meal. Wrap in heavy aluminum foil, sealing the edges by folding the foil together several times. Fold the ends the same way. Wrap again with the seals to the other side. Cook in a pressure cooker in about 2 inches of water for about 40 minutes (count the minutes after the pressure is built). Cool completely before unwrapping. Chill before serving. This recipe keeps in the refrigerator for several days. Serve sliced, over crackers.

Conventional Cooking Method

Prepare the meat and ingredients as above, wrapping in foil. Place the wrapped meat in a large Dutch oven or large stockpot in 3 inches of water, cover the pot, and boil over medium/high heat for 1½ hours.

Meat Pastries

Empanadillas de Picadillo

This recipe is made with *Picadillo*, which is found in the Pork, Beef, and Other Meats section.

Yields about 8 to 10 meat pastries

6 tbsp. milk

3 tbsp. cooking oil

½ tsp. salt

12 tbsp. flour

½ lb. prepared *Picadillo* (see the Pork, Beef, and Other Meats section for recipe)

In a large bowl, mix the milk, oil, and salt. Add the flour a little at a time, blending completely, but do not knead. Cover with plastic wrap, and let stand for 30 minutes. Knead the dough well and form a roll. Cut into 2 or 3 inch sections, and roll out with rolling pin, forming a flat disk, about 5 inches wide. Fill each one with a tablespoon of *Picadillo* in the center. Wet the outside rim and fold, pressing down with a fork to seal. Deep fry in hot oil. Drain on paper towels.

Beef Dome

Domo de Carne

Serves 6 to 8

1 bunch green onions (chives)

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup dry beef slices (found in the canned meat section)

1 large cream cheese, regular or Neufchâtel (8 oz.)

Dash black pepper

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup sliced almonds or chopped walnuts

Chop the green part of the green onions and discard the white portion. Cut the beef into small sections. Place the beef and the green onions in a food processor. Cut the cream cheese into chunks and add to the food processor; add black pepper and process until smooth. Using your hands or a wide knife, shape into a dome (or ball), and press the almonds or walnuts over the entire dome to cover completely. Serve with crackers.

Bacon and Date Rolls

Rollitos de Bacon y Datiles

Yields 16 to 18 rolls

1 to 1½ cup dry dates

1 lb. sliced bacon

Toothpicks

Place a date at the end of each slice of bacon, and roll up completely. Use a toothpick to hold the bacon in place. Bake in 350 degree oven for approximately 25 minutes, or until bacon is crisp. Let them drain in paper towels before serving.

Variation: Bacon and Chestnuts

Replace the dates with canned chestnuts, rolled in brown sugar. Roll each slice of bacon with one chestnut inside. Bake the same way.

Swiss Cheese Fondue

Derretido de Queso Suizo

This is a favorite party dish. It looks sophisticated and tastes wonderful.

Serves 10 to 12

2 cups natural Swiss cheese,
shredded
2 cups shredded Gruyère cheese
(**)
1 tbsp. cornstarch
1 garlic clove, cut into halves
1 cup dry white wine (Pinot Gri-
gio)
1 tbsp. lemon juice
3 tbsp. kirsch or dry sherry
½ tsp. salt
⅛ tsp. white pepper
French or Cuban bread, toasted
and cut into 1-inch pieces

Toss cheese with cornstarch until coated. Rub garlic on bot-
tom and sides of heavy saucepan or skillet, and add wine. Heat
over low heat just until bubbles rise to the surface; wine should
not boil. Stir in lemon juice. Gradually add cheeses, about ½
cup at a time, stirring constantly with wooden spoon over low
heat until cheeses are melted. Stir in kirsch (or sherry), salt, and
white pepper. Transfer to fondue dish and keep warm over low
heat. Serve with toasted bread.

Note: If fondue becomes thick, stir in ¼ to ½ cup of heated
wine. **You can substitute 2 additional cups of Swiss cheese for
the Gruyère if desired.

Seafood Salad

Ensalada de Mariscos

Yields 8 to 10 small servings

1 lb. crab meat (or imitation crab meat)
2 celery stalks, chopped
2 hard boiled eggs, chopped
1 large apple, cored and cut into small cubes
¼ onion, chopped (I prefer white onion for this recipe)
2 tbsp. ketchup
Dash salt and black pepper
¼ cup mayonnaise (light or regular)

Flake the crab meat with 2 forks. Add all the ingredients until well mixed. You can add more mayonnaise, if desired. Serve on crackers, or for a more creative look, serve on lettuce leaves or inside clam shells.

Note: I save the shells from clams used for seafood dishes, wash and dry them, and then store them for later use at parties for serving this salad.



Traditional Chicken Salad

Ensalada de Pollo Tradicional

This is the traditional chicken salad served at the Cuban birthday parties of yesteryear.

Serves 16 to 18

- 8 chicken breasts
- 2 large potatoes, peeled and cut into ½-inch cubes
- ¼ white onion, cut in chunks
- 2 cans sweet, red pimentos (7 oz.) with 1 can set aside for decorating
- 2 Red Delicious apples, peeled, cored, and cut into cubes
- 3 boiled eggs (1 set aside for decorating)
- 2 small (8 oz.) cans sweet peas (Petit Pois)
- Dash black pepper
- Mayonnaise to taste
- Salt to taste
- 1 can white or green asparagus for decorating (can use both types)

Boil the chicken breasts in salted water until tender. Let cool, and take off the skin and the bones from the chicken, saving the broth for another recipe. Boil the potatoes in a separate pot, until they are cooked through, but not too tender; you do not want them to get mashed. When they are just right, drain the potatoes and put them in cold water to stop the cooking process. In a large bowl, shred the chicken meat by hand or with 2 forks. Place the onion and 1 can of red pimentos in a blender and puree. Pour the mix onto the chicken meat, and toss to blend. Add the apples; 2 boiled eggs, chopped; the sweet peas; the black pepper; and enough mayonnaise to hold everything together. Check the salt, and add more if necessary. Fold in the potatoes carefully to keep them from breaking apart. Transfer to a serving dish, and decorate with the asparagus, slices of red pimento, and 1 boiled egg, thinly sliced.

Fruit Cocktail Salad

Ensalada de Cocktel de Frutas

Serves 6 to 8

2 large cans fruit cocktail, drained
(28 oz. each)

½ head iceberg lettuce, chopped

¾ cup chopped walnuts

Salt and pepper to taste

Mayonnaise (light or regular)

Mix all the ingredients with enough mayonnaise to hold them together. Serve cold as a side dish or party treat. For a more decorative display, serve inside lettuce leaves.

Crushed Pineapple and Cream Cheese Salad

Ensalada de Piña con Queso Crema

Serves 4

1 can crushed pineapple (20 oz.)
½ 8 oz. cream cheese (Neufchâ-
tel is creamier and has less fat)
1 carrot, grated
1 apple, cored and cut into small
cubes (or chopped)
1 box raisins (1½ oz.)
1 tbsp. sugar

Strain the crushed pineapple, and use some of the juice to soften the cream cheese in a medium bowl. Add the strained pineapples, and the rest of the ingredients together, folding them in carefully. Chill before serving.

Note: I recommend grating the carrot with a hand grater. It comes out softer and juicier.