

Beyond the Big Screen

MAKE MOVIE NIGHT A TASTY TREAT

compiled by HEATHER HOWER

YOUR FRIENDS MIGHT THINK the film is the why they came, but they'll quickly learn that food is the star of the show.

Vail Valley chef and owner of Season to Taste Allyson Stephens has created cuisine for everyone from jetsetters to the kindergarten set. Before you settle in under cozy blankets and fluffy pillows, prep a feast worthy of Hollywood's A-list.

Here are a few of Stephens' ideas to make movie night a double feature. One fun plan is to make a theme: classic cocktails like a Boulevardier, Negroni or Manhattan go hand in hand with a classic film and a chilly fall night.

"Drinks should be light and refreshing such as the ever-so-popular Aperol Spritz. Or, a watermelon puree cocktail, which can easily be made into a mocktail for the kids," Stephens says. Puree the watermelon and strain. Mix with simple syrup and club soda. Stop there for a fun treat for the kids, or add vodka and Triple Sec for a little kick.

Movie night should be easy and delicious. Think finger foods that are a bit upscale, suggests Stephens. Chicken, ground turkey, lamb or beef sliders are easy to make and eat.



THINK FINGER
FOODS THAT ARE
A BIT UPSCALE



Chef Allyson Stephens creates a menu that just might steal the show.

"(Or try) homemade mini personal pizzas and breaded baked chicken bites with a Spanish Romesco dipping sauce," Stephens says. "These dishes will appeal to the adults as well as the kids at movie night. There is a theme of easy-to-eat, yet elevated casual cuisine."

No matter how full you are from dinner, popcorn is a must. Hot, buttery popcorn is a great standby, but Stephens amps it up with both healthy and "slightly indulgent" options.

Make your own spice mixes or butter creation: maple bacon or peanut butter-Sriracha, anyone? "To go along with the popcorn, marinate some whole roasted almonds in olive oil, fresh rosemary sprigs, smashed garlic, salt, pepper and red pepper flakes for

a couple days. Strain and pat dry," she says. "Dips are always a hit at gatherings and are an easy choice for a movie night since your family or guests can quickly grab some spread and sit back down without missing any of the flick."

For many of us, a night at the movies isn't complete without sweets. Stephens suggests going beyond Jujubes and M&Ms. Sneak in some fruit by adding chocolate dipping sauce; use the same sauce for pretzels (oh, the sweet-and-salt combo!). A few other options from Stephens: homemade ice cream sandwiches rolled in sprinkles or a build-your-own candy bag buffet.

"For those who enjoy sweets and an after-dinner coffee, a delicious Affogato will be the star of the show," Stephens summarizes. **VVH**