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*Recipes excerpted from **Happy Holidays from the Diva of Do-Ahead** by Diane Phillips. Published by Harvard Common Press, Boston, MA. Copyright 2006. Reprinted with permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.*

Sweet Potato and Apple Gratin

Tart Granny Smiths and sherry-spiked sweet potatoes are a perfect combination for this delicious side dish, which is terrific with poultry or pork and a welcome change from the usual marshmallow-and-yam casserole served at Thanksgiving. I have taught this dish in my do-ahead Thanksgiving classes for more than 20 years, and it is even a hit with people who don't like sweet potatoes.

Two 32-ounce cans sweet potatoes, drained (See "The Diva Says" note below)
2/3 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
2/3 cup dark corn syrup
1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, melted
3 tablespoons cream sherry
1-1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg
4 medium-sized Granny Smith or other tart apples, peeled, cored, and sliced 1/4-inch thick

The Diva Says: If you would prefer to use fresh sweet potatoes, bake 8 medium-size sweet potatoes (remember to poke holes in them) at 425°F until tender when squeezed with an oven mitt, 50 to 60 minutes. When cool enough to handle, cut in half and scoop out the flesh. Proceed as directed.

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
2. Put the sweet potatoes in a large bowl. With an electric mixer, beat until smooth. Add the brown sugar, corn syrup, 1/4 cup (1/2 stick) of the butter, the sherry, cinnamon, and nutmeg, and blend until creamy.
3. Spread half of the sweet potato mixture into a 10- to 12-inch pie plate 2 inches deep or a 13 x 9-inch baking dish. Arrange half the apple slices over the potato layer and brush with some of the remaining butter. The butter will seal the apples and prevent discoloration. Spread the remaining sweet potato mixture over the apples and arrange the remaining apple slices on top in an attractive pattern. Brush with the remaining butter, covering the apples completely.

Diva Do-Ahead: At this point, you can cover and refrigerate for up to 4 days or freeze for up to 1 month. Defrost and bring to room temperature before continuing.

Bake the dish, uncovered, until the apples are golden brown, 30 to 40 minutes. Serve warm.