



Holiday Guide
to serving tasty
meals



When you have the cooking skills, food and nutritional knowledge, and a plan, the practice of cooking becomes doable and yes, enjoyable! You can do it!

Are you a health-conscious person or a foodie that wants to master your kitchen? You might be struggling with health issues that can be changed through food. You might love to have friends over and want to cook in a way that gives you confidence. Or, maybe you're an adventurer that wants to experience the world through food?

Community Cuisine is simply a group of like-minded people who believe health starts with what we eat, whether simple or extravagant, and cooking is best from scratch.

Enjoy my emails, and visit me on Instagram, Facebook, and Pinterest where I share cooking tips and recipes. I'll teach you the cooking skills needed to gain confidence in the kitchen. This confidence builds a greater appreciation and love for cooking that supports and moves you towards your personal goals while having fun.

Did I mention that I trained in France and have too many years in the food industry to share here? One thing is definite, I never get tired of food, whether cooking it, sharing it, or enjoying it! You can learn more about me at CommunityCuisine.com

See you in the kitchen,

- *Chef Barbie*



Planning a Gathering

I love gathering together for a meal. While going out is fun, it's expensive and can be hit or miss. Plus, it's difficult to talk with a big group seated at a long table. There's just something special about being in an intimate setting like one's home.

And it's not just about the food - it's about the connections formed, the conversations shared, and perhaps the joint effort of a meal prepared together with everyone gathered in the kitchen.

Admittedly, it can be lots of work for the host and can be stressful, so I've put together some tips that come from years of catering and hosting parties. Believe me; there have been times when I've been behind schedule and had to run to the bedroom to change as a guest is knocking on the door!

Planning is key! When I get overconfident and think I'll remember everything, I inevitably don't!

Planning also makes for a peaceful celebration and saves you from exhaustion, missing out on the party, or forgetting something in the oven.

Below are my five steps for throwing a great gathering. I like to say "gathering" instead of "party" because the guests are what it's really about! Yes, the food is important, but at the end of the day, it's coming together with your people that mean the most.

General Tips

- **Plan your event well ahead:** This allows you time to think, be creative, and change your mind.
- Often, we focus on the food and cleaning the house. Once the day comes, we haven't figured out what serving dishes to use, etc. This last-minute thinking becomes stressful and exhausting.
- Take a shower early! "Stuff" happens, and we get behind. Care for yourself in the morning. Plan your outfit out ahead of time.
- Continually assess your plans and drop what feels overwhelming.
- Double-check and consolidate your list.
- Check your timetable.
- Schedule when you'll get dressed.
- Be confident!



ONE - Planning: Pick A Theme

Plan your event well ahead. This allows you time to think, be creative, and change your mind.

Choose a theme. This allows you to have a cohesive event, and it helps to narrow your options so that you're not "all over the place" when planning. Is this a Christmas or Hannukah party? A friend's birthday, who loves dogs? A summer BBQ? An excuse to get together when your garden is in bloom?



Your theme could be:

- A color, toy, flower, or, a photo in a magazine, etc.,
- White dishes with white linens, pears, and green apples
- Wood bowls, dark baskets, tapestry colors, red apples, purple grapes
- Teddy bears and gingerbread
- Old Italian family artifacts with a basket of whole eggplant, tomatoes, and dry pasta
- Pumpkins, bread baked in terra cotta pots, pumpkin soup in a pumpkin tureen
- Easter eggs, baskets, asparagus spears, tulips
- Look around your house for inspiration and props. Things that have been in the living room, bathroom, or garage for years can be used as props or serving dishes.

TWO - Plan your menu around the theme

- What is in season? What colors go well with your theme?
- Combine old standbys that you know and love with one or two new recipes
- Combine textures and food groups
- Combine homemade recipes with store-bought items
- Plan a menu that people will help you make at the party
 - A Grill station at the backyard BBQ
 - A salad station
 - A dessert decorating station
- Ask guests to bring a dish
- Plan a few do-ahead dishes with one or two last-minute dishes like a salad
- Ask new friends if there are dietary restrictions or dislikes
- Cook from scratch according to your comfort level, and don't go overboard

How much to prepare:

- Choose one to three hors d'oeuvres before a dinner party
- Choose seven to eleven dishes for a cocktail/open-house style party, with more variety as the party grows in size
- Guests will eat about nine pieces per person
- A good mix is one to three cheeses, 1 fish, 1 smoked fish, 1 chicken, 1 beef or pork, 2 vegetables, 1 bread or pastry, and 1 to 3 desserts

Remember to:

- Write your menu down and note where the recipes are! It's easy to forget where you saw that great recipe! Keep this list on your fridge
- Keep a grocery list going on the fridge or on your phone
- Make note of garnishes you would like to use, such as "rosemary from the garden." Busyness or a glass of wine may make you forget your beautiful hand-carved radishes in the fridge!

THREE: Deconstruct the menu into parts and make your shopping and to-do list

- As a catering chef with a big crew, if something wasn't on the list that needed to be done, we'd add it simply so that we could check it off with over-the-top cheers from the crew! You feel so accomplished!

Make two lists:

- WHAT TO BUY/GROCERY LIST
- WHAT TO DO & WHEN

Cuppa coffee by your side, go through each recipe and decoration idea, and figure out how early you can buy and/or prepare that item. Jot the info down on your lists. Keep your to-do list and menu on the fridge so it doesn't get lost or tossed!

- It could be as simple as cutting bread into bread cubes and freezing them
- Pie dough can be made, shaped into a disc, and frozen
- Meat can be thawed
- Veggies can be washed days before
- Cheese can be grated



FOUR: SET THE TABLE(S)

- Set the table(s) days ahead if possible, or at least gather items together on a tray, etc., for last-minute table setting.
- For “roaming” parties, set “stations,” such as different tables in different rooms for drinks, hors d'oeuvres, or dessert and coffee.
- Leave a sticky note, so you know what goes where.
- Scout the fabric stores for table covers. Hem, or pull the fabric up under the table with rubber bands or pins for a quick-themed look.
- Use unexpected containers such as small ice buckets for breadsticks, terra cotta pots for veggies and dip, old carving board for cheese, etc. Salads look gorgeous on large platters rather than deep bowls.

Next:

- Set out all of your platters and move them around to design a nice look.
- Place a Post-it on the dish so that you remember what goes on it.
- Place post-its on the table under the dish so friends or kids know where to place the dish once it's full of food.
- Have small bowls with a toothpick inside to let guests know where they belong when used.



FIVE: PARTY DAY; IT'S SHOW TIME!

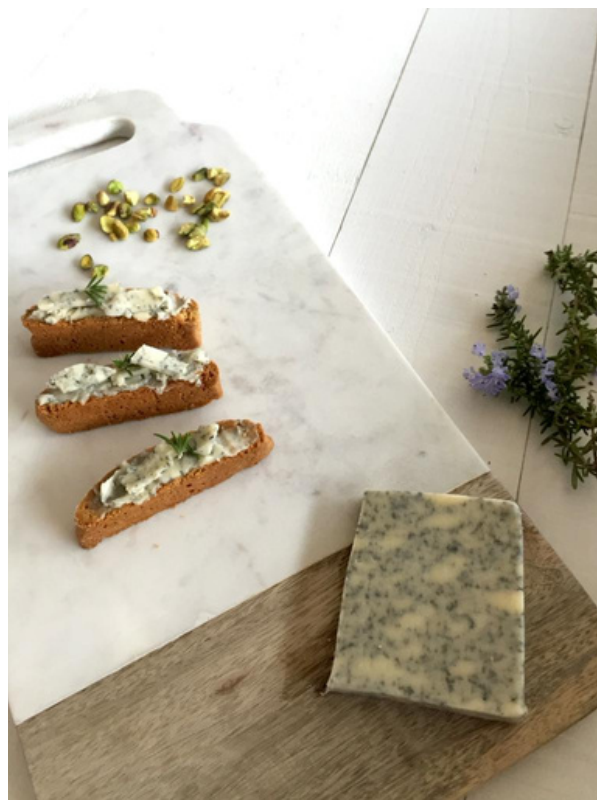
- Pick out what you are going to wear days ahead and get dressed early. Don't wait until everything is done; your guests will all have arrived!
- **Most importantly, Invite guests into the kitchen!** Cooking together or just being in the kitchen together creates an environment that is relaxed and inclusive and encourages great conversation.
- The process of preparing a meal often involves discussing different ingredients, techniques, and personal preferences.
- Memories come up of family traditions and past favorite dishes. These conversations spark lots of laughs and the sharing of anecdotes, creating a fun and meaningful atmosphere.
- **Save your notes from year to year.** It's fun to look back and helps you to remember where that great recipe is!

Last, after the gathering or the next day, take time to:

- Reflect on the event
- Take time to think about the people you brought together and the relationships formed
- Relive hugs, laughs, and conversations so they become memories
- Think about the menu successes and bombs, and choose a place to save your favorite recipes
- Feel good about creating a gathering where people could meet, connect, renew friendships, and more. **Good job!**

Blue Cheese Biscotti

1. Bring a good quality soft blue cheese to room temperature
 2. Spread cheese onto homemade or purchased biscotti. I like biscotti with fennel seeds with the blue cheese.
 3. Finely minced about 1/2 tsp fresh rosemary and toss with coarsely chopped pistachios.
 4. Sprinkle over blue cheese and serve at room temperature.
- Rosemary is optional.



Gather. Educate. Celebrate.

Join me for cooking classes, lectures, culinary events, and immersive trips and find a new appreciation and love for cooking.

Find out more:

[European Culinary Trips](#)

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www.communitycuisine.com