

Hosting an At-home Brunch

Written by By: Vanja Veric

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Springtime holidays like Easter and Mother's Day mean more reasons to get together with close family and friends, but throwing big dinner or cocktail party can be tiring and repetitive. Switch things up this season by hosting an at-home brunch for your loved ones. While it may seem like a feat to take on a brunch at home, we're giving you inside tips on how to make your event unique, easy and delicious.



Guest list and event theme

The first step to throwing a Sunday brunch at home is to decide how many people will attend. Since this isn't a huge party, keep the guest list intimate. This is a casual way to chat and enjoy and great meal with your closest friends so try to keep the guest list to eight or fewer people.

It also helps to come up with an overall theme for your brunch. It doesn't have to be too elaborate, but if there is an upcoming holiday or if you just want to showcase the season you're hosting in, it's a fun way to spice up a simple breakfast or lunch day and will give your guests something to really look forward too.

If you do set a specific theme, make sure to tell all of your guests beforehand so they know what to expect, especially if they'll be bringing anything to the brunch like flowers or a certain dish. Plan your menu and decor around your theme, but remember a brunch menu does have some specific components.

Thomas Nasworthy, Executive Chef at Carefree Station, suggests hosts should plan a budget for their brunch to make the whole preparation quick and simplify the decor.



Menu

Since, by definition, a brunch is a combination of breakfast and lunch, the most successful brunches have a combinations of both meals presented at the table.

Nasworthy says hosts should create a well-balanced menu that contains an egg dish, a lighter item, and at least one lunch dish. Also, keep in

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mind when creating your menu that you may be catering to people with very different food preferences. A brunch isn't something that can be planned on a whim in a matter of minutes, since it requires invites, particular decor and a menu set to serve lots of tastes, it's important to think about what food will be served before hand.

Hosts should plan a menu ahead of time and head to the store a few days before the brunch to get everything they need so they're not scrambling the day of. Nasworthy breaks down some of the most popular brunch items hosts can present quickly and easily but that will appeal to all of their guests: "Eggs Benedict are a staple on a brunch menu, and they can be served in a variety of ways, so that you can offer several topping choices to appeal to all of your guests," Nasworthy says. "With a good hollandaise, poached eggs, and some type of brioche or English muffin for a base, the possibilities are endless. You can make traditional eggs Benedict with Canadian bacon or get creative and try crab, sirloin, turkey and spinach or even spice up your hollandaise with some Southwestern spices and top with chorizo."

Nasworthy says breakfast potatoes are also good side dish for a brunch menu since they have mass appeal and are usually a crowd favorite. Hosts should also round-out the menu with a lunch dish such as a classic Monte Cristo sandwich that they can cut into quarters for serving.

Of course, what brunch would be complete without mimosas? Since these drinks require almost no preparation, you get more time to chat with all of your guests. Just combine equal parts Champagne with equal parts orange juice. For an unexpected touch, Nasworthy suggests to drop a strawberry or a couple of raspberries in the bottom of the glass.

To save yourself time and hassle the day of, prep some of your dishes the night before. If you're serving sandwiches, get all the ingredients sliced and ready to build, or if a fruit salad is on the menu, chop everything the night before and set it in the fridge so you can just combine it when your guests arrive and avoid spending the majority of the event in the kitchen.

It's also smart to set the meal up family-style with dishes set in larger plates in the middle of the table for guests to grab and plate themselves. It's great for all your attendants because they can pick-and-choose what they want to eat, and it will make your life easier and will require less food.



Decor

A brunch, while casual and fun, should be treated as more than just an average meal; it should be a real occasion, something special you get to celebrate with the ones you care about. "It doesn't have to be too stuffy, but it should be a little more formal," Nasworthy says.

Nasworthy suggests using nice china and silverware instead of paper and plastic and using a tablecloth and cloth napkins to set the stage. And to keep the overall look elegant, place store-bought items such as granola or yogurt in serving dishes and carafes.

If you're planning your event around a certain theme, make sure the decor ties in with the overall idea. Since some of the most popular brunch themes tend to represent particular seasons, run those ideas throughout color schemes, centerpieces, plates and invitations. "If it's a spring time brunch, set the table with vases of brightly colored flowers. For summertime, tall glass vases or bowls with citrus, or if your brunch is in the fall, decorate the table with gourds, miniature pumpkins and corn husks," Nasworthy says. "For an event closer to the holidays, opt for Christmas-type decorations such as pine cones and wreaths. Go to your local craft store and walk the aisles of the seasonal section for more decor ideas."

Remember, a brunch, while it can be elaborate and formal, should be fun and simple. Preparing ahead of time, setting a consistent theme and choosing fun, whimsical decor will not only save you headaches during the event, but will allow you to spend less time placing hostess in the kitchen and more time with what really matters--enjoying a day with the people you care about.