



Buffets are a fine choice for big groups because they provide variety and the chance to mingle.

Buffet entertaining tips and timesavers

Buffet-style meals are often the best option for large gatherings of friends and family. Space constraints can make it difficult to sit everyone down for a formal meal, and buffets enable guests to mingle with one another while selecting only the foods they want to eat.

These are not the only advantages to buffets, however. Plenty of dishes can be made in advance and stored in the freezer, providing hosts and hostesses a little breathing room. Meals can be prepared a few days in advance and heated up come the day of the festivities.

Buffet service can work any time of the day and can include both cold and hot foods if they are kept at the right temperature. Explore these other tips for entertaining buffet-style.

- Present food in an easily accessible location. Place food on a table or counter that will not be in the way of foot traffic. Arrange

dishes and cutlery at the head of the buffet line so guests can move in an orderly fashion as they select their food.

- Tie together utensils for ease. Group forks, knives and spoons with a cloth napkin and dish so guests can easily grab what they need for dining.

- Practice food safety. Hot dishes need to be kept warm and cold dishes need to be placed on ice. Chafing dishes make this possible. Use chafing dishes and pans in combination with your serving plates. Heated elements or sternos under chafing dishes will keep foods steaming. Place crushed ice and water in a pan under cold foods to keep them chilled. Food should be removed if it has been sitting at room temperature for more than two hours.

- Experiment with meals that keep. Stews, casseroles, soups, baked pasta dishes, and similar fare can be made in advance and frozen. Thaw these dishes in



Buffets can be easier on hosts and hostesses and ensure that guests of various tastes all have enough food at their disposal.

the refrigerator the day before the party, then heat up foods and serve for the buffet. Prepared foods purchased at a supermarket or specialty retailer also work well for buffets. Simply purchase and then set out for even less work.

- Weigh your catering options. Catering services can make easy work of holiday hosting but not without expense. Caterers may charge by the person or by each tray of food. Some will include table settings and rolls with the price; others may not. Calculate the costs of using a caterer and weigh them against the cost of doing the work yourself.

- Use plastic utensils for hot foods. Metal spoons and forks can quickly heat up when sitting in hot serving

dishes. Use plastic utensils so guests do not get burned.

- Keep dressings on the side. Salad dressings and other condiments can cause foods to wilt or get soggy. Have them nearby so guests can help themselves. Topless squirt bottles are easier to handle and can help limit spills.

- Be mindful of food allergies. Although you may have various foods available to meet the dietary needs of guests, do not place risky foods next to others. Cross-contamination can occur from spills or if a person uses the same serving spoon to dish out foods. Label food options so everyone knows what's available.

- Ask a friend to help set up. Ask a close friend or family member to come

over an hour or two early to help you set up the buffet and with any other last-minute touches. This will take some of the pressure off of you, and you can chat and enjoy yourself before your hosting duties begin.

- Frozen foods should be thoroughly wrapped. Only use freezer-safe bags and containers to store prepared foods. Otherwise you may run the risk of freezer burn or freezing, affecting the taste of the final product. Keep in mind that many desserts, such as fruit pies, also can be frozen. It's possible to make ahead just about everything for a holiday feast and simply thaw and reheat when the big day arrives.

- Create a good side dish ratio. Buffets should in-

clude a variety of side dishes. Select one or two main dishes and then vary the rest of the selection with rice, pasta, vegetables, or other favorite side dishes.

- Keep take-away containers on hand. You're bound to make more food than you need, so send guests off with their own goodie bags to lighten the load on your leftovers. Encourage guests to fill up a container and take some food home with them.

- Lock pets away. An open, unattended buffet can seem like paradise to a hungry cat or dog. It's not sanitary or particularly appealing for guests to catch a pet taking advantage of buffet fare. Keep pets in a bedroom or outside when the meal is being served.

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Happy Thanksgiving!

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In the tradition of Thanksgiving, we'd like to share our thanks and best wishes with all of the good folks we know here in the community. Your friendship and goodwill have made this a very special year for us, and we are grateful for your kind support.

Thank You & Happy Thanksgiving!

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