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There are various ways for hosts to simplify cooking for a crowd this holiday season.

4 tips to simplify cooking for a crowd this holiday season

Families big and small typically celebrate the holiday season together. For some, celebrating the holidays with family requires traveling, while others stay put and welcome family and friends into their homes.

At some point during the holiday season, celebrants who host family and friends will no doubt prepare a homecooked meal for their loved ones. Cooking for a crowd can seem like a daunting task, especially for first-time hosts. However, there are various ways for hosts to simplify cooking for a crowd this holiday season.

1. Prepare a familiar dish.

Hosts may agonize over their holiday menus, and some may feel compelled to prepare a family specialty or the same dishes their parents or grandparents prepared for holiday dinners when they were children. But holiday hosts can make things easy on themselves by choosing

dishes they've made in the past, regardless of their place in family history. Chances are the ingredients for hosts' own specialties are already in the pantry, saving a potentially time-consuming trip to the grocery store. And thanks to the familiarity factor, hosts' own specialties likely won't require as much time to prepare.

2. Share some cooking duties.

Another way to simplify cooking for a crowd is to invite guests to bring along a side dish or dessert. Guests who live nearby can make something in advance of the big meal, while hosts can hand over their kitchens to overnight guests who express a willingness to contribute their own homecooked dish to the party. Sharing the cooking duties gives hosts more time to connect with friends and family and serves as a great way to plan the menu in advance.

3. Only make what guests are likely to eat.

Hosts also should not feel pressured to cook more food than is necessary. Holiday meals have a tendency to be lavish, but hosts don't have to spend all day in the kitchen preparing food that will likely end up as leftovers or trash. Get a final headcount in the days before everyone comes over and adjust your recipes accordingly.

4. Start early.

If the big is on Christmas Day, that does not mean hosts have to start cooking while everyone unwraps their presents. Hosts who are uncertain about what to cook can look for meals that can be prepared in advance so come the big day all they need to do is turn on the oven and let meals cook while the family spends time together.

Hosts can employ various strategies to simplify the process of cooking for a crowd this holiday season.

Improve entertaining spaces



A few improvements around the house can make entertaining more comfortable for hosts and their guests.

Some homes are seemingly built for entertaining, while others may need a little help to make them more fit for hosting dinner, holiday gatherings or an evening with friends.

Overall, one-quarter of people entertain guests in their home either daily or weekly across the globe. One-third entertain monthly, according to findings from GFK Insights.

People who open their homes to loved ones may want to make some modifications to their spaces to improve the experience for all involved.

- Tame the clutter. Look for ways to reduce clutter in rooms where entertaining takes place. Built-ins with bookshelves and cabinets can hide electronics and wayward toys or collectibles. Focus attention on the entryway, hanging hooks for collecting coats, keys and shoes, so they do not overrun the foyer. Remove any knickknacks or other breakable items from shelves or on coffee tables to free up more space.

- Improve conversation seating. Arrange tables and chairs to create conversation nooks for guests who want to talk and get to know one another better. Consider moving out big and bulky sofas in favor of love seats or comfortable chairs that will take up less room and improve flow in entertaining areas.

- Find the pieces you like. Think about how you tend to entertain and then cater your

space to those preferences. For example, a large dining table with fold-out extensions or leaves is ideal for someone who regularly hosts formal dinner parties. Renovate a room to include a small bar and club chairs for a lounge feel if cocktail parties are typical.

- Improve lighting. Work with an electrician and/or designer who can offer ideas for lighting that can set the mood for entertaining. Rooms that are dull and dim can benefit from overhead lighting fixtures if there are none already available. Task lighting in the kitchen under cabinets can make it easy to prepare food for guests. Wall sconces or

focused lighting on artwork can establish a dramatic effect.

- Do major construction. Consider working with a builder to make some changes if you simply don't have the space to entertain. Taking down a wall can open kitchens to living spaces, while adding a deck or three-season room off the kitchen or dining room can provide more space for guests to congregate.

- Install a guest bath. Update or add a bathroom near the main entertaining areas. This allows guests to discretely use the bathroom and keeps them from roaming in areas of the house you would prefer they avoid.

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