

Menu One

[appetizers]

OVERVIEW

Level: Beginner (no cooking required)

Number of Guests: 8

Food: Build Your Own Charcuterie Platter

CHARCUTERIE

Build your platter from the following suggestions

Arrange items on a large board or serving platter

Select 3 - 6 types of cheese (pick soft, semi-soft/semi-hard, and hard varieties)

Crackers and bread

Select 2 - 3 cured meats (salami, prosciutto, pepperoni)

Nuts (almonds, pistachios, etc)

Pickles/small olives or other pickled treats

A few spreads like jam (try fig!) and grainy mustard

Dried fruit or grapes

DESSERT

Choose from the following: fancy chocolates, bite size brownies, mini cupcakes, little cookies, or anything that looks good from the bakery section of the grocery store. Keep it bite-size. 1 - 3 items.

BEVERAGES

Beer, wine, sparkling/flat water. For a fancy upgrade, try infusing your water with fruit.

SUPPLIES

Large board or tray for charcuterie, small plates, forks or toothpicks, knives for spreading, napkins, cups/glasses. Bowls for scraps.

SHOP LOCAL

Trader Joe's, Holiday Market, Western Market, and Provisions.

PRO-TIPS

If you're worried you won't have enough food put out cut veggies, and/or hummus and pita to extend the meal. Keep it simple. You can always ask your guests to bring their fav beer or wine to share!

Menu Two

[casual theme night]

OVERVIEW

Level: Intermediate (some cooking required)

Number of Guests: 8

Food: Taco Bar

BUILD YOUR OWN TACOS

Make a large batch of your favorite tacos (keep warm in a crock pot)

Essential Toppings: tortillas (use the smaller soft taco or street taco size), shredded lettuce, shredded cheese, diced tomato, salsa, sour cream

If you're feeling fancy: rice, beans (whole or refried), taco sauce

Chips and dips (pick one or two): salsa, pico de gallo, guacamole

DESSERT

Optional. Try cinnamon ice cream, spicy Mexican chocolates, or add a little cayenne to a box brownie mix for a fun kick.

BEVERAGES

Margaritas, Mexican beer, sparkling/flat water.

SUPPLIES

Plates, napkins, utensils, cups, bowls for the toppings, crock pot (or similar) to keep taco meat warm.

EXPLORE THE INTERNATIONAL AISLE

You can make your own taco seasoning or explore the variety of spice packets and marinades available in the international aisle of your favorite grocery store. Check for dessert or Mexican pop in that aisle as well. Instead of ground beef tacos, try pork, chicken, or ground turkey to switch it up.

PRO-TIPS

The bar idea can easily apply to many other casual theme parties: bagel bar, burger bar, hot dog bar, sandwich, etc. Just have a large supply of the main dish and load up on fun toppings.

Inviting vegetarians? Check out Morning Star crumbles in the freezer section.

Menu Three

[sit down dinner]

OVERVIEW

Level: Hard-ish (cooking required)

Number of Guests: 8

Food: Pasta

ITALIAN DINNER

Salad (Choose one. Make your own, you can do it!): Antipasto, Caprese, Mixed Field Greens

Bread (pick out something yummy from the bakery/freezer section)

Add olive oil and dried Italian herbs to the table for dipping (bonus points if you serve the bread warm)

Pasta Dish (choose one, or pick your own, and make): Lasagna, Spaghetti with Meatballs, Risotto, Pesto or Gnocchi
Freshly grated Parmesan cheese

BEVERAGES

Wine, sparkling/flat water, Serve coffee with dessert for a special touch.

DESSERT

Make or purchase cannoli or tiramisu.

SUPPLIES

Pots and pans, wine glasses, water glasses, utensils, napkins (bonus points for cloth), plates, assorted table decorations: unscented candles, flowers, place cards, etc.

RECIPE SUGGESTIONS

Spaghetti and Meatballs, *How to Cook Everything* by Mark Bitman (pg. 531)

Pasta and Pesto with Potatoes and Green Beans, *Essentials of Classic Italian Cooking* by Marcella Hazan (p. 177)

Roasted Vegetable Lasagna, *Make it Ahead* by Ina Garten (p. 127)

PRO-TIPS

If you're making a new recipe try it out a week or two in advance. Don't be afraid to switch up pasta shapes for your favorite. Ribbed pasta is great for holding sauce. When a recipe calls for reserving pasta cooking liquid do it! It makes the sauce so much better.