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Tips for Hosting

Hosting a meal, whether it be a brunch, lunch or dinner is a great way to get to know people better. Here are some tips to help you get started on hosting a fun, faithful and yummy meal. Please remember that your guests are there to socialize with you and the other guests. They aren't expecting a Top Chef experience.

Before the guests arrive:

1. Once you craft your guest list, let your guests know what kind of get together it is going to be (brunch, casual plate in hand, appies only, a proper full-on dinner) and ask if there are any food allergies or dietary instructions. As well, if you have a pet, let your guests know in case they have allergies or if they or their child has a fear of dogs/cats.
2. Many times guests ask if they can bring something. I say, take them up on it as long as you're ok with it. I often suggest a dessert so I don't have to think about that part of the meal. You can suggest an appetizer or salad as well.
3. I find have some nibbles that guests can snack on when they arrive is often appreciated. Sometimes guests have had an early lunch or no lunch at all and are famished when they get to your home. Also, appetizers are most appreciated if your meal takes a little longer to get to the table.
4. The atmosphere of your home can help make it a memorable experience. By no means do you have to have a HGTV show home. A couple of candles (non-scented) and maybe a small vase of simple flowers can make all the difference. Dim the lights, and make sure you have enough toilet paper and soap in the bathroom.

Cooking for your guests:

1. Think of the seasons when you design your menu. Stews, chilis etc. for winter, bbq in the summer. Try to eat food that is in season. Food that is in season is easier to find, more economical and tastes better.
2. Design your menu a day or two in advance and shop for it.

3. My secret to entertaining is to do as much as possible in advance. If the meal can be made an hour or so before and just hang out in the slow cooker or oven it makes hosting much less stressful. Some people can start making food from scratch once their guests walk in the door, but that is not me.
4. Try to work out the timings of the food you are preparing, so you won't be caught with some items being over cooked and others undercooked.
5. Drinks. Not everyone is a wine expert. If you are unsure, go to the liquor store, tell him/her what you are serving and ask for a suggestion. Also let them know how much you want to spend. Be sure you have options for non-drinkers as well. Even a nice pitcher of water with lemon or lime is appreciated by everyone.
6. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Nobody expects you to be Martha Stewart in the kitchen. If you need help chopping or stirring, recruit a friend or family member.
7. One handy but easily forgotten tip when preparing is to clean as you go along so that your guests don't arrive to a mess and so you have an easier clean up afterwards.
8. Try to remember that part of the fun of entertaining is the preparation itself. Turn up the music, pour yourself a glass, and go for it! Remember, everyone will appreciate your hard work and probably only you will notice if something isn't quite as you expected. It doesn't have to be perfect, it's all about having fun and sharing your faith with those you care for.