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Dinner Parties Made Simple
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Dinner Parties Made Simple

A Guide to Giving Successful Dinner Parties

Written by – Michael Ambrosio

Published by – [Inmarkon Services](#)

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Introduction

The first thing I need to say right up front is, “Well, I’m no Martha Stewart.”

If you purchased this book thinking I would turn you into some kind of “dinner party king”, I will say now that it’s not too likely.

I wrote this book specifically for the beginner. Someone who has never thrown a dinner party because they think they can’t.

I’m here to say you can, and I can show you how.



When you follow the guidelines in this book, I am confident that you will throw a dinner party that will surprise – and amaze – your friends.

Before you start reading, there are a few things to cover. First and most important is that you have the confidence in your own abilities. This is not as hard as you think. Be open minded.

Second, since this electronic book is formatted for Acrobat readers, I’ll go over some items to make navigation easy:

How to Use this Book

Printing

Some people prefer to read in print, not on the screen. To print this book, simply click on the printer icon in the tool bar.



Navigation

There are several ways to navigate through this book. Let's review them . . .

Scroll Bar – Use the scroll bar by clicking on the scroll box and holding it. You can then drag the scroll box up and down. You will see the page number appear – when you see the page number you want, release the scroll box and you will jump to that page.



Hand Tool – Click on the Hand Tool Icon. Move to the page and click and hold. While holding, move the cursor up or down to drag the page up or down.



Navigation Buttons – Here's a description of the buttons and their function (refer to picture below):



- 1 – First Page button takes you back to page 1
- 2 – Previous Page button takes you back one page
- 3 – Next Page button takes you forward one page
- 4 – Last Page button takes you to the end
- 5 – Previous View button takes you to the last VIEW
- 6 – Next View button takes you to the next VIEWED page.

Page Jump – Just click on the arrows to move between pages. You can also jump to the last or first page, or just type in the page number you want.

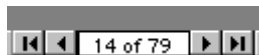
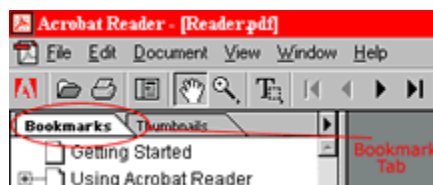


Table of Contents – Click on the Show/Hide Navigation Pane button to bring up the Navigation Pane.



Once the Navigation Pane is open, click the Bookmarks Tab to bring up the Table of Contents.



Links

Throughout this book and in the resources section you will find several active hyperlinks. Some jump from one page to another within this ebook. Others take you to the internet. The ones taking you to the internet require you to have a connection. Seems obvious enough, but if you're anything like me, you may forget.

Oh, You Poor Guy . . .

I know what you're thinking . . .

"Why in the world would I need to know how to throw successful dinner parties?!?"

Truthfully? You don't really NEED to know. However, I've learned through my own experience that if you're looking for a way to impress a certain someone . . . this will go a long way to making a very good impression.

Remember the old axiom, "The way to a man's heart is through his stomach"? Well, it holds true for both sexes.

In today's busy world, someone who cooks regularly (especially if you're single) is the exception.

Someone who can throw a *dinner party* - well, now there's a rarity! You'll stand out, believe me. And it's not as hard as you think!

And So It Begins

Let me indulge in a story . . .

After my 10 year relationship (4 dating and 6 married) ended, facing the prospect of dating after so long was nerve-wracking! I was never the Don Juan type! There I was - just over 30 and going back to the beginning. Ugh!

I was fortunate to have a few female friends where I worked at the time. In an effort to cheer me up, I was invited to a dinner party at the home of one of these friends. I thought, “Wow, a dinner party? Me?” Of course – I accepted. ;-)

As it turned out, I was the only man invited to this party (boy, they REALLY must have felt sorry for me, huh?). I had the pleasure of dining with seven beautiful ladies.

Talk about being cheered up ;-)

I was the first to arrive.

From the moment I walked through the door, I was hit with the incredible aromas of the food cooking in the kitchen, and it smelled *wonderful!*

I noticed there was some appropriate music playing softly in the back round. And the dining room table looked incredible!

I was anxious to get this party under way! The other guests arrived shortly after I did and the dinner party started.

First was an appetizer, served as we sat in the living room, chatting amongst each other. It was a serving of sliced tomato and fresh mozzarella cheese with fresh basil, lightly coated in olive oil and balsamic vinegar.



Soon after, we moved to the dining room and started with a salad consisting of several types of lettuce. There was some romaine, green leaf, and some chicory, topped with some arugala, carrot shavings and croutons. The dressing was a choice between a balsamic vinaigrette and oil and vinegar.

From there we moved on to the main course, a delicious chicken marsala over white or brown rice (the host made both so we could choose).

Conversation lulled a bit during the main course because the meal was so good! I couldn't remember the last time I had had a meal like this. Good food, good company, good conversation - and of course, good wine!

After the meal was finished, the dining table was cleared of the dinner dishes and replenished with dessert plates and coffee cups (my favorite part of the meal!). Conversation resumed as the dessert and coffee made its way to the table. And not just one dessert - two!

After too much dessert, coffee and wine, the night drew to a close, much to my disappointment. The evening was lively and a complete success. Everyone was well fed, satisfied and happy.

As we retrieved our coats, I was officially invited to a dinner party the next week, being given by one of my other friends.

Of course, I accepted!

All the way home the events of the evening, and the food, ran repeatedly through my head. Definite success!

A week later, I went to the next dinner party. I won't go through all of the details and specifics this time. Let's just say that this one was just as successful as the first one.

A week after that - another one. Another success.

I was getting quite spoiled by these dinner parties. My standards for the food I was eating went way up. I even started cooking better meals for myself.

At work, I was getting quite a reputation among the other men. They were envious of my being invited to these dinner parties and they weren't. My confidence levels were at an all time high.

But then it dawned on me - Sooner or later **I would have to return the favor!** I would have to throw a dinner party!

And I was right! My friends decided that the next party would be at my place!
Help!

Uh-oh, My Turn!

When it comes to cooking, I'm no slouch. I can hold my own in a kitchen.

I've never thrown a dinner party, though, and I could feel my new found confidence levels eroding...

How could I possibly throw a dinner party to remember after going to several dinner parties to remember? This couldn't be a "canned" dinner. I had to come up with a plan.

I toiled for a few days over this, but I finally formulated my plan. It was time to put it to the test. What follows is my plan for throwing a successful dinner party.

Before We Get Started, a Note to the Men

Let me go off on a tangent for a moment. You may be wondering what I mean by a "successful" dinner party. The term "successful" is subjective. We all have our own definition. Let me give you my opinion on this:

As far as I'm concerned, when it comes to cooking in general and dinner parties in particular, us men are far easier to please. A couple of burgers, fries, beer - pizza - franks and beans - served up in a huge mound on plain white paper plates . . . we're good to go!

Turn on some kind of sporting event for ambiance, for dessert - chips and pretzels! WOOF, WOOF! (I know, stereotype! Mostly true, though).

The women *I* know, well, they would be gracious at a dinner party like that but I'm sure they wouldn't be impressed by it. After all, the whole point to a good dinner party is to show the women in our life (or the one special woman . . . ;-) that we have within us a feminine side.

What?!?! Feminine side? What the heck are you talking about!?

Relax gentlemen. Like it or not, every man has a feminine side within. Nothing wrong with it. It helps us communicate with women and understand them better.

Learn to get in touch with it - trust me on this!

True story: Whenever my girlfriend and I go to her parents house for dinner, her mom and I end up chatting about cooking, trading recipes and ideas, things like that.

My girlfriend and her dad chat about changing the oil in a car, World War II aircraft, and woodworking projects.

It's a sight to see, really. Every year for Christmas, I ask for, and usually get, some wanted or needed item for the kitchen.

OK, Let's Start Planning

Anyway, as I was saying – the planning stage. In a nutshell, planning a dinner party follows an old rule of thumb:

Who (is coming to dinner). What (will you be serving). When (will the dinner bell ring). Where (do we set the table). Simple, right? Let's take these one at a time.

First Things First - Who's Coming to Dinner?

The first thing you need to do is determine WHO will be attending. This is a must because it will determine WHAT you will be serving.

You need to ask the invitees what food preferences they have, if they're vegetarians, or if there is anything that someone *CAN'T* eat, (case in point – people allergic to nuts or certain spices and herbs can have a bad reaction if you use it in your meal).

For your first dinner party, you may want to invite 6 to 8 people. This is a manageable number; enough to have an entertaining evening, while it still feels personal.

Also, most recipes you come across prepare for 4, 6 or 8 people, so it will be less confusing . . .

Note: Although you want your dinner party to be elegant, it doesn't need to be formal. This is the other reason I suggest you invite all friends (or family) to your first party.

Tip: For your first dinner party, invite people you know and can be comfortable around. It will keep you loose and you'll get more honest feedback. Very important information for your next party.

So What Do I make?

Once you have made your guest list, start asking them about preferences, likes and dislikes. It's just as important to know what *NOT* to make as what *TO* make.

Now, take all this information and sit down with a piece paper and a pen. Start on your menu!

First, you must determine what main course you will serve. This is important because it will help you choose an appetizer, soup and/or salad, side dishes, desserts, drinks etc.

Let me go through one of my first menus with you so you can get an idea of how I planned the entire dinner (You will notice that the items on the menu follow the same general motif – Italian. You should ensure that this is the case when you plan your menu.)

Tip: If you know there are certain things you can make, steer them in that direction. For example, I love to make homemade lasagna (or anything with an Italian gravy (sauce)). Once again, this will put you in your comfort zone. You can experiment with new dishes some other time.



Dinner Menu Selections

Appetizer

Focaccia Bread with Tomatoes

Salad

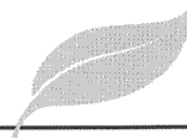
Green Leaf with Arugala,
Mushrooms and Tomato

Main Course

Steak Pizziaola
Italian Broccoli
Dinner Rolls

Dessert

Black Forrest Cheesecake and Banana Crunch Cake





For the main course, I decided on Steak Pizzaiola.

This dish prepares quickly and with minimal attention, so you can spend time with your guests.

Also, it sounds elegant, looks delicious, tastes wonderful and offers many choices for the accompanying dishes.

Don't forget - the idea for a dinner party is to spend time with your friends and maybe impress that special someone with your ability . . . Making the whole affair look effortless REALLY goes a long way in the "impressed" department.

Part of the planning process includes your table. Make sure you have everything you need. This is why planning plays an important role.

If you know what you're going to serve and how many guests there will be, then you will know what you need for your table.

With that said, why don't we start with . . .

Table Setting

You might be thinking, “Why get into table setting? Who can’t set a table?”

Well, that’s a good point, actually. But I figured we would touch on this just in case there is a reader or two out there that’s never set a table for more than one.

You’ll want to set your table well before your guests arrive. First impressions are everything, so you want your guests’ first impression to be a good one. Therefore, we not only want to have the table set, we want it to be set correctly (or as close as we can get it).

There are so many ways to set a table, depending on a number of factors. Formal settings will differ from non-formal.

Will there be soup, salad, both? Wine? What kind of wine? What main dish are you serving? Bread and butter?

See what I mean? So, we’re not going to kill ourselves, debating over the *exact* or *proper* way to set a table.

I have already assumed that your guests (at least during your first dinner parties) will be all friends and family. I’m sure if something in the table setting is not exactly right, they’ll forgive you! We will concentrate on a casual dinner, not formal, setting.

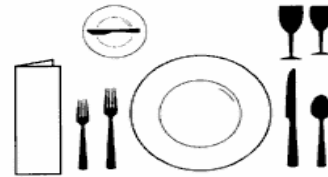
Tip: Set the table the night before. This way, there’s one less thing to worry about while you cook. If this is not possible, then organize your dishes, flatware, glasses etc. so that when it’s time to set the table, everything is ready at your fingertips! Makes you look like you know what you’re doing . . .

Casual Setting

We'll start with some general things to remember.

Allow for 24" to 30" for each place setting. This will help avoid over-crowding.

Place settings should be 1" from the edge of the table.



Place silverware in the order of use. What is to be used first is placed farthest from the plate, and so on.

Knives are placed to the right of the plate, with the knife's cutting edge facing the plate. Spoons are placed to the right of the plate and to the right of the knives. All forks are placed to the left of the plate, in order of use. If salad is to be served with the main course, or if the salad fork is to be used as a dessert fork, it is placed to the right of the dinner fork, next to the plate.

Some Details

The bread and butter plate is optional at a casual dinner party, so don't worry if you don't have them. If you are planning to use a bread and butter plate, place it to the ***upper left*** of the dinner plate and lay the butter spreader horizontally across the plate, with the blade facing the plate.

Knives are set to the immediate right of the dinner plate, blades facing the plate.

A soup spoon, if needed, is set to the right of all knives.

Forks are placed to the left of the dinner plate in the order of their use, from the outside toward the plate.

Dessert spoons and forks can be brought to the table with the dessert plates.

Water glasses (if used) should be set just above the top of the place knife. The wine glass is placed slightly to the right of the water glass.

A cup and saucer can be brought to the table along with the teaspoon with dessert.

Place a folded napkin to the left of your forks.

I personally stay away from candles and centerpieces. As far as I'm concerned, they may look nice but I feel they can get in the way of the interaction.



Imagine having to constantly look around the centerpiece to speak to your guests. Again, this is a personal choice.

Now, that wasn't so hard, was it. You now know how to set a table in an *informal* setting.

A formal setting is more extensive, and changes with certain foods, so I won't cover it here.

I would think that if you're ready for a formal dinner party, you will have done enough informal ones to know where to get the information (research, remember?)

With your table set, we're ready to move on to the next phase – planning your menu!

Menu Planning - Choices, choices!

Let's Start with the Appetizer

For the appetizer, you should choose something that sets the tone for the meal. If you are planning an Italian meal, make something that goes with it. For my appetizer, I chose Focaccia Bread with tomato and cheese topping.



This is one of those dishes that you can prepare well in advance, and pop it into the oven as the guests arrive. Hot and fresh from the oven!

Tip: There are many resources that can help you find what foods go together. Many cookbooks have suggestions as to what side dishes you can serve with the main course, which dessert, or what wine(s) to serve. Of course, there's always the internet. See the Resources section at the end of this book.

You can serve the appetizer at the dinner table, but what I like better is to serve it in a casual setting.

Once your guests arrive, they will probably be sitting in your living room chatting. Bring the appetizer out on a tray or platter and allow your guests to use a small plate on their lap, or on the coffee table.

Be sure to hand out some napkins!

This is also a good time to break out the drinks. Hopefully you did your research so everyone has what they like ;-)

Now, before the main course, there are a few options to consider. You can go with soup, salad, both or neither. This depends on your guest list (hence the

prior research), the time factor or even your own personal preference. I chose to go with a salad only for my first party simply because of the time factor.

Home made soups take a while to make, depending upon the soup. Personally, I was never one to go with canned soups. An alternative would be to buy some at a local restaurant with good soups. (No, don't do the restaurant thing for the entire meal. You'll be found out and look foolish). If you go this route with the soup, be honest about it and give the credit where it's due.

On to the salad

A salad should *not* be just a handful of lettuce thrown into a bowl and dressing dumped on top. Take some time putting this together.

Use different types of lettuce, such as Romaine, Red Leaf, Chicory. This will give both a different look and a different taste.



Add some color with Arugala, Tomatoes, Carrot Shavings or some radish.

And by all means – do *not* put the dressing on top! Let your guests do that. In fact, supply a choice of dressings for your guests to pick from.

If you have it, use a salad bowl set – a large bowl for the salad, serving tongs, and matching serving bowls. If you don't, you can borrow a set, or just use something that looks decent.

The main course

Steak Pizziaola. Mmmm, sounds good, doesn't it? Sounds like it would be tough to make.



It isn't.

Want to know how?

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OK – here it is . . .

Prep time: 20 mins.

Cooking time: about 50 mins.

Serves about 4.

Braccioni, 1½ lbs (This is a very thin sliced beef. You may need to see the butcher at your supermarket.)

Olive Oil – to coat the frying pan

Fresh mushrooms, 1½ cups (You can buy a package of pre-sliced mushrooms in the produce section)

2 tsp Oregano

3 or 4 cloves of garlic, minced

2 cups of Newman's Own Venetian Sauce (Yup – Jarred sauce)

Cut meat into 2" strips.

Heat olive oil in pan (use a large pan, preferably cast iron if you have one).

Arrange meat in the pan.

Pour sauce over meat.

Add mushrooms, oregano and garlic.

Cover skillet. Heat on medium heat for 15 minutes. Lower heat. Separate and turn meat. Cover and simmer on low for 35 minutes, stirring occasionally, until meat is tender.

Tip: Depending on your schedule, it may be a good idea to do some of the prep work the night before, such as cutting up the meat, slicing the mushrooms or mincing the garlic. Just be sure to wrap everything up and store it properly.

OK – simple to prepare, and it cooks itself once it gets going. You only need to check and stir every now and again. This frees you up for the side dish preparations, and socializing with your guests.

Side Dish

Now that we have the main dish started, and we know approximately when it will be done, we can prepare the side dishes. Remember, you should choose your side dish to go with your main dish . . .

Once again referring to the menu above, we will prepare Italian Broccoli. This recipe serves about 4, so adjust accordingly:

Prep time: about 5 or 10 mins,
Cook time: about 15 mins

1 bunch fresh broccoli
2/3 cup Italian salad dressing
1/3 cup white wine or water



Cut fresh broccoli into spears. In a large skillet combine all ingredients. Cover and simmer on med – low heat for 15 minutes or until broccoli is tender.

Note: You can cut the broccoli spears ahead of time. This will save a few minutes in the kitchen.

Dinner rolls – for these, just use some store bought rolls you can pop into the oven. Again, note the cooking time required, so you can time it accordingly.

If you've done your homework on prep and cooking times, you should have no problem timing everything to be ready around the same time.

Don't forget to take into account your stove and oven temperatures. Oven thermometers come in handy here.

Let me stress once again the need for research and planning. The meal above is simple and elegant, and much can be pre-prepared to minimize kitchen time while your guests are over. You will find that there are so many excellent dishes you can prepare that are simple and elegant, and of course tasty. Invest in a few cookbooks, or go online and search food and recipe sites (a few links are included in this book, so it's a good place to start).

While having good food is important, I want to spend some time going over something people tend to not even think about.

That is . . . *Timing!*

Timing is everything

If there's anything that will make or break your dinner party, it's timing! It's important to know what you're making – main dish and side dish(es).

Why?

Well, imagine, you seat your guests because your main course is done. You bring out a steaming hot tray (or platter or bowl) of food, and boy it smells good!

But . . .

The broccoli isn't finished! The rice needs a few more minutes!

Now imagine your guests sitting there, smelling that wonderful food. What do you do? Do you let them start on the main course before the sides are finished? Do you wait? What if it takes long enough that the main dish gets cold?



Hmmm . . .what a mess! Now you go from *impressive* to *putz!*

OK, OK. So messing up a dinner party does NOT equal a world crisis, I know. And if your guests are family or friends, well they'll get over it.

But if you invited that person you were hoping to impress, well, kiss THAT idea goodbye!

How to Avoid Timing Problems

If you're kind of new to the cooking world, then I would suggest that you make a "dry run". Practice.

That's what I do when I'm trying out a new recipe. I usually will make it for my family and get their feedback (especially my mother's – she an excellent cook!)

Also remember that while timing is important, you don't want to be chained to the kitchen while your guests are in the other room staring at the walls.

Although I have already mentioned this, the other key to timing is proper planning and research.

Choose the dishes you'll be making and know the timing for both *preparation* and *cooking time*. Once you know that, then it's all a matter of scheduling!

Another way to ensure everything is served hot, and together is your oven and/or microwave. Use your oven's warmer to keep things warm. Use your microwave to reheat your side dishes.

This also helps free up your burners when one dish is done and another needs to be cooked.

This may sound daunting to the beginner, but trust me – it's not. It's easy if you choose the right dinner to prepare.

To help you plan your first couple of dinner parties, I have included a planning guide (at the end of this book). Print it out and use it to help you get organized. Believe me, it really helps to see things written down!

Also included is a menu planning worksheet. Use this to help you plan out your parties.

Remember – start out with small parties, like 6 to 8 guests. As you get a few parties under your belt and your confidence grows, move on to larger parties.

Wine - I'm No Expert . . .

Wine and dinner parties seem to go hand in hand. Have you ever gone to one and NOT been offered wine – or offered to bring it?

Although I'm no expert when it comes to wine, I do know a LITTLE about it. There is also tons of information to be found, either in the bookstores or on the net.

Some Basics, First

When I say basics, I mean some *very* basics. We'll go through different wine types, which wines go with which foods and show you a Vintage Chart. So, without further ado . . .



Know Your Wines		
Type	Taste	Goes With . . .
Red Wine	Dry – No taste of sweetness.	Sturdier foods. Cheese. Steak, roast beef, barbecue, lamb, veal, game and dishes with strong seasonings.
White Wine	From crisp, bone dryness to rich, luscious, honey-like sweetness.	Ideal with fish or fowl. Cheese. Pork or ham, veal some soups (clear, creamed, vegetable or chicken)
Rosé Wine	Possesses the briskness of red and the fruitiness of white. Can be very dry or have a touch of sweetness.	These wines go extremely well with most any dish. Soups, Seafood dishes, fowl, pork, ham, some game.
Sherry, Port,	These vary from very dry through medium to	These wines are best enjoyed before the meal, in place of a

Madeira, Marsala, Kosher and Fruitful Wines	very sweet. Drier wines can be served chilled or on-the-rocks.	cocktail or after the meal. Cocktail snacks, appetizers, some fruits or sweet desserts. Good for informal get togethers.
Champagne and Sparkling wines.	Light and delicate. Vary in taste from very dry (Brut) through extra dry (medium sweet) to dry (sweet)	Champagnes and sparkling wines are for grand occasions and are ideal right through the meal, or any time – with or without food.

There are much more comprehensive lists and definitions out there. I only intend to give you a starting point. You will have enough information about wines in this section to get you through you first few (casual) dinner parties.

The bottom line about selecting the right wine is this: forget the rules. Use common sense. Selecting the right wine to go with dinner is not rocket science.

Selecting A Wine

Start by choosing a wine that you would drink by itself.

Why?

The bottom line is that most likely, the majority of the wine you'll be drinking will be without food anyway. You know – while you schmooze with the guests. Before and after dinner.



If you enjoy the wine by itself, you won't go too far wrong if you have it with dinner.

In today's wine world, you're better off choosing a wine not by its color but by its size and weight. Light wines, up to the more full-bodied, flavorful wines. If you balance the wine with the food by choosing one that will seem about the same weight as the food, you raise the odds dramatically that the match will succeed.

I'm sure some wine purists out there will have spinning heads over the previous statements, but as I've said earlier – these are just the very basics. We're more concerned with the overall success of the dinner party than which wine to choose.

In our resources section, I have provided links to some Wine web sites, which will be a big help explaining the subtleties of wine sizes and weights.

The Language of Vino

You may or may not like wine – I for one prefer water to wine – but it can be an integral part of the dinner party. People sometimes go to great lengths to make sure the right wines are served.

However, conveying how you feel about the wine is a language all its own. A language that at times can make you appear to be, well, a snob, (ever watch Frazier?)

I'll attempt to clarify some of the terminology used to describe wine. If you feel foolish using some of the terminology look at it this way – it'll help start a conversation that can be both fun and educational.

Wine Country

There are some areas of the world that are well known for making good wine.

Quality wine is made from grapes grown in relatively (and surprisingly) few places in the world. Here's just a few:

United States: The best known wines typically come from California's Napa Valley or Sonoma County. Oregon is also well known.

- France: Best known for wines from Bordeaux and Burgundy. (Ever heard of French wine?) Champagne is another popular choice.
- Italy: Let's see, how about Chianti or Tuscany. These are excellent wines. Ever hear of Asti Spumanti? I thought so.
- Spain: Cava is a good sparkling wine. They also make a very good Sherry and Rojas (red) wine.
- Australia: Not as well known yet, but moving up fast. The only wine I am personally familiar with is their Shiraz.

Grape Types

As I'm sure you know, different grapes make different wines. I'll list some of the most common types:

- Merlot: Makes a light, soft red wine. California and Chile make excellent versions.
- Pinot Noir: Makes a full, rich red wine, a little softer than Cabernets. Typically, these grapes are used in Champagnes, sparkling wines and Burgundy.
- Cabernet Sauvignon: Wine made from these grapes age well. Frequently blended with Merlot or Cabernet Franc grapes. This enables you to drink it "right now". Typically a rich, full bodied wine that goes with hearty foods. Bordeaux wines are usually made with these grapes.
- Zinfandel: Made in the USA – California to be exact. A red wine with a full, strong flavor. It has a sort of "spicy" taste. There is also a White Zinfandel, which is sweeter. It's also a Blush wine.

Chardonnay:	These grapes make typically elegant white wines. Excellent with many foods. California white and Burgundy white are most commonly made with these.
Sauvignon Blanc:	Makes a nice crisp white wine. A nice “picnic” wine. White Bordeaux typically uses these grapes.

Now, I know there are more than these, but I have found that these are the most common among the wines your average person drinks. The people I know, anyway.

Now that we have a familiarity with wines, grapes, and where many of the most popular wines come from, let’s go over some terms used when describing wines.

Some Terminology

There’s literally tons of descriptive terms associated with wines. So I won’t bore you too badly. Here are a few of the more popular terms:

Smell

Aroma:	Used commonly to describe relatively “young” wines. Grapelike smell.
Bouquet:	Describes the fragrance, usually in regard to more “mature”, complex wine-smells.
Heady:	When you hear this, it usually denotes a wine with a high alcohol content.
Nose:	Commonly used to describe the <i>amount</i> of wine smell i.e. “. . . huge nose” to a wine.
Woody:	Describes the smell or taste of the actual wooden barrel where the wine was stored. A little wood in your wine is not a bad thing. This term usually means too much wood in the wine.
Sour:	Smell or taste that comes from partially spoiled wine. The most common cause of wine spoilage is improper storage.
Fruity:	Wine that smells or tastes like different fruits, like berries or citrus fruits. Usually has few tannins. Not always sweet.
Musty:	Synonym for corky. This can be caused by a bad cork, excessive moisture or a moldy wooden cask. Unpleasant.

Taste

Body:	Broad term. Describes the wines “fullness”, or how much flavor.
Complex:	Describes wine that has a number of characteristics. Good wines that age well are usually described as complex wines.
Neutral:	As the name implies, there’s really nothing special, good or bad, about the wine.
Dry:	Wine that is not particularly sweet.
Buttery:	Refers to both flavor and texture; how it feels in the mouth.
Nutty:	Typically describes wine that has been exposed to the air. This can be good unless there’s too much oxidation. It’ll take on the flavor of Sherry.
Supple:	Wine with well balanced tannins and fruit.
Acrid:	Wine with too much acidity. Cheap red wine (or good wine, depending on your viewpoint . . .)
Flat:	Not enough acidity. Boring. Uninteresting.

Again, there are many more terms, but this will get you familiar with the more commonly used descriptions. With some practice, maybe you’ll even sound like an expert . . .

The Vintage Chart






Use the chart on the following page to help determine the rating and readiness of some wine.

It answers the questions: “Is it any good?” and “When should I drink it?”

Definition: In case you were wondering, **Tannins** are acids that give wine an astringent quality. Helps to balance out a fruity taste. It can also have too much acidity if not balanced properly.

Dinner Parties Made Simple

REGIONS/WINES		'99	'98	'97	'96	'95	'94	'93	'92	'91	'90	'89	'88	'87	'86	'85
CALIFORNIA	Cabernet Sauvignon Napa/Sonoma/North Coast	92	85	95	92	92	97	90	93	95	93	83	80	93	90	92
	Chardonnay Napa/Sonoma/North Coast	90	89	95	90	93	90	90	92	92	93	82	88	80	91	93
	Pinot Noir Napa/Sonoma/North Coast	91	90	94	91	91	93	90	90	93	90	85	92	89	88	91
	Pinot Noir/Chardonnay Central Coast/Santa Barbara	90	89	95	89	89	92	85	89	91	91	86	88	87	86	89
	Zinfandel Napa/Sonoma/North Coast	91	87	91	93	92	95	92	91	92	92	85	84	92	88	89
FRANCE	Oregon Pinot Noir	92	92	84	86	87	94	91	90	90	92	88	89	80	86	94
	Washington Red	96	93	91	90	87	95	89	92	91	89	95	87	93	82	89
	Bordeaux/Red Medoc & Graves	88	89	86	93	91	88	85	80	80	98	96	89	81	95	93
	Bordeaux/Red St. Emillion & Pomerol	89	92	85	87	93	90	86	NR	NR	98	93	90	81	90	89
	Bordeaux/White Sauternes & Barsac	90	88	90	88	88	80	NR	NR	NR	96	90	97	NR	95	86
	Burgundy/ Red	88	88	89	92	90	85	88	80	85	95	91	88	90	NR	91
	Burgundy/ White	87	89	89	92	91	87	83	91	NR	92	91	84	NR	92	90
	Rhône/ North	90	92	91	87	91	89	NR	NR	93	93	97	92	86	86	92
	Rhône/ South	89	97	85	85	93	88	87	NR	NR	96	95	89	NR	80	90
	Loire/ Dry and Sweet White	89	86	85	92	91	82	89	83	NR	91	92	87	NR	89	86
Alsace	84	89	96	90	88	86	84	80	NR	93	96	89	NR	NR	89	
Champagne/ Vintage	88	87	85	92	89	NV	87	NV	NV	98	90	88	NV	87	95	
ITALY	Piedmont	92	95	93	95	88	81	87	NR	NR	98	97	91	81	NR	90
	Tuscany	89	88	95	86	92	85	87	NR	86	93	82	91	NR	85	94
	Veneto/ Amarone	88	89	95	NR	94	87	88	NR	NR	95	NR	93	NR	NR	91
SPAIN	Rioja	90	88	85	89	95	94	85	84	88	90	90	85	87	84	85
	Catalonia	90	88	88	89	91	91	89	80	82	88	86	86	88	NR	87
	Ribera del Duero	89	88	87	98	95	92	NR	82	94	91	95	NR	84	98	88
GERMANY	Portugal/ Port/Vintage, Quinta or LBV	86	87	93	85	91	96	NR	92	91	85	86	83	85	82	95
	Rhine Regions	91	89	88	95	88	92	87	87	85	94	91	87	NR	83	87
AUSTRALIA	Mosel/Saar/Ruwer	90	89	89	93	93	92	90	87	85	95	90	90	80	80	90
	Barossa	86	86	90	91	93	89	91	81	92	93	84	87	83	90	92
	Coonwarra	93	93	95	87	82	86	91	84	94	96	82	89	86	94	89
S.AMERICA	Hunter Valley	91	92	87	89	88	89	86	85	94	86	87	83	89	92	85
	Chile	92	84	91	90	89	90	89	85	86	89	87	86	85	82	NR
	Argentina	90	83	89	95	95	90	93	88	87	93	90	83	NR	NR	NR
	South Africa	92	93	90	82	91	86	84	87	88	85					
	New Zealand	91	95	88	90	80	91	81	86	93						

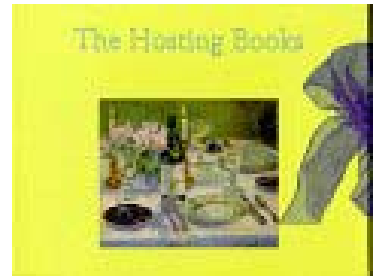
KEY TO RATINGS	KEY TO MATURITY	OTHER EXCEPTIONAL VINTAGES
98-100 = Superlative 94-97 = Classic 90-93 = Excellent 87-89 = Very Good 83-86 = Good 80-82 = Acceptable NV = Nonvintage NV? = Undeclared, but probably nonvintage NR = Not Rated	 Hold  Can drink, but not yet at peak  Peak maturity, ready  Past peak, still drinkable  Past peak, probably undrinkable	Bordeaux: 1982, 1978, 1966, 1961, 1959, 1955, 1953, 1949, 1947, 1945, 1937, 1934 Champagne: 1982 Rhone Reds/Southern: 1983, 1981, 1978 Burgundy: 1978, 1976, 1972, 1969, 1959, 1952, 1949, 1947, 1945 Tuscany: 1982, 1978, 1971 Veneto: 1983, 1979, 1976, 1974, 1971, 1970 Rioja: 1982, 1981, 1978 Calif. Cabernet: 1984, 1978 Calif. Chardonnay: 1980

Vintage Chart courtesy of [Wine Enthusiast Magazine](http://www.wineenthusiast.com)

A Couple of Hosting Tips

Some of these tips are just common sense. I'll list them anyway, just in case you forgot them. After all, considering all the work you've put in to your dinner party, you want it to come off without a hitch.

1. I touched on this in a previous section, but I prefer to stay away from a centerpiece, or candles on the table. Or if you want to put something like that out for show, simply remove it before everyone sits down to eat.
2. If you insist on candles, don't use scented ones. It usually interferes with your meals aroma, and at times, they can have an unappetizing effect.
3. This one is oft forgotten. Once your guests are seated at the dinner table, make sure no one has to ask for a refill. Stay on top of things.
4. When you serve the food, remember a couple of things; don't overfill their plate. Keep helpings small. Make sure the plates have enough room for all of the food, or you have an extra plate (a small one).
5. Once dinner is finished, before dessert is served, clear everything off the table, including salt and pepper shakers, wine glasses, condiment dishes. Anything that was used during the meal.
6. Very important – A good host will help along the conversation, help people shine, stop a bore (tactfully) from droning on and on, even play peace keeper from time to time. In your planning stages it will help if you know if there's any topic someone considers "taboo", or if there's some good news to share, anything to keep things rolling.



I'm sure there's more, but these will suffice for those parties where it's friends and family – the more casual parties.

So What's Next?

We've covered quite a bit so far. Table setting, appetizers, salads, main dish, side dishes, hosting tips and planning.

There's only one thing left to cover . . .

Tip: Anyone who bakes will tell you that baking can be tricky and time consuming. If baking is not your strong suit, then I would recommend going to a GOOD bakery to buy your desserts.

Dessert!

This is my favorite part! Cheesecake. Chocolate Mousse Cake. Cream Puffs. I could go on . . .

I think this is the part of the meal I dreaded most, from the preparation standpoint.



Obviously, you DON'T want to be baking a cake while your guests are there. You want to make this in advance.

Not one for being intimidated by the kitchen, I decided on not one but TWO desserts – Black Forest Cheesecake and Banana Crunch Cake. Two very different but equally good, (in my opinion) desserts.

These I knew would take me some time to make, so I made them on the two previous nights before the dinner party. I believe that cheesecakes taste better after sitting a day or two, so I made that one first.

After everyone has finished their dinner, it's time to clear the table to get set for dessert and coffee. Just be sure everyone is actually finished before clearing plates!

If you are eating in a room other than the kitchen, then take the dirty dishes to the kitchen and just stack 'em up for now. You can clean after everyone's gone.

Just two things, though – if anyone offers to help, kindly and gently turn them down. They're there to enjoy themselves, not work.

Tip: I like to get the coffee ready for brewing before the guests arrive. Usually, as I am cooking, I will set up the coffee pot, fill the sugar bowl and creamer, and maybe (if you have the room) stack the cups and saucers in a convenient spot.

On your first trip to the kitchen make the coffee.

Now, if you've done your research, you may also need tea, or leave the wine out – whatever.

Or how about a nice liquor for the coffee, such as Amaretto or Crème de Cocoa or Irish Cream.

Before bringing out the desserts, if they are indeed cakes or pies, I like to pre-slice a few pieces. I do this because sometimes, people don't want to be the first to cut a piece. And, it's just easier to start the serving.

As for the coffee, bring out the pot (or better yet, a carafe if you have one) along with the cream and sugar. I let my guests pour their own coffee.

The main reason this is my favorite part of the evening (aside from the dessert itself) is that this is the part where everyone just relaxes and talks.

This is what I have these parties for – friends (or family) gathering to talk.

Let's Sum It Up

Why don't we summarize everything right here into a checklist. This way, for your first few dinner parties you have something to refer to. I find it easier to have a visual reference.

Go through the checklist below. It's really self explanatory. After two or three dinner parties, you won't even need it.

Invite your guests.

Remember – your first party should be close friends or family.

Set a date.

Research!!!

Find out what your guests like/dislike, check for food allergies or dietary needs.

Determine what to make.

Shop.

Prepare everything.

Set your table.

Check the guidelines above.

Cook.

Serve.

Enjoy your guests!

Planning Guide

Print this planning guide to help in your preparations.

Planning Guide			
Who's Coming To Dinner?			
Name	Available Dates	Food Preferences	
Total Guests:		Date of Party:	
Total Budget for Shopping:		\$	
Shopping List (List everything you need to go out and buy.)			
Things To Remember			
Let's be sure we have everything we need:			
<i>Item</i>	√ or N/A	<i>Item</i>	√ or N/A
Food Shopping		Candles or centerpiece	
Wine or Liquor		Serving tray or platter	
Place Settings		Dinner music	
Flatware or Silverware			
Salad Set			
Coffee Service			
Serving Spoons, etc.			
Tablecloth			
Wine Glasses			
Dessert			
House Cleaned			
Pick out music			

Note: Use the blank Item spaces to add in whatever you want.

Menu Planning Worksheet

Print this out, sit down and think about what you would like to make for your dinner party. Don't forget your research! Base your menu on what your research tells you.

Plan The Menu List a few of each dish. Mix and match your ideas. Decide what will need to be prepared in advance			
	Theme - First Idea	Theme - Second Idea	Theme - Third Idea
Appetizer			
Soups and Salads			
Main Dish			
Side Dish(es)			
Dessert			
Drink and Wine Choices			

Recipes

I have put together a small collection of my favorite recipes. I have used many of these at one dinner party or another, so I am sure of two things: 1) They are relatively simple to prepare and 2) They went over very well!

Note of Disclaimer: These are recipes I have collected over the years from friends and family. These were not taken from any books or other media that I am aware of. Any and all similarities to recipes already published is purely coincidental.

[Appetizers](#)

[Main Dishes](#)

[Side Dishes](#)

[Desserts](#)

Appetizers

Focaccia Bread With Tomato and Cheese Topping

Ingredients:

1/2 Cup extra virgin olive oil
1/3 Cup balsamic vinegar
1 or 2 Clove(s) garlic - minced salt
freshly ground pepper
1/2 lb cherry tomatoes - halved
6 oz fresh mozzarella - coarsely grated
1/4 c basil leaves - thinly sliced

Preparation:

In a bowl, mix the oil, vinegar and garlic. Season with salt and pepper. Add cherry tomatoes & mix. Leave at room temperature. This topping can be prepared several hours ahead. Heat broiler. Place cheese on top of focaccia or half loaf of Italian bread (toasted). Place under the broiler until cheese is melted and crust is golden. Remove from oven and top with tomato mixture and basil. Serve immediately

Tomato, Basil, And Mozzarella

Ingredients:

4 Small Ripe Tomatoes
2 Bocconcini (Mozzarella Cheese)
Dressing
3 Tbls Olive Oil
1 Tbl Lemon Juice
3 Tbls Torn Fresh Basil Leaves

Preparation:

Wash the tomatoes -- but don't peel them. Cut into thin slices, but keep them together. Cut the mozzarella into thin slices. Arrange on individual plates -- alternating slices tomato and cheese, packing them tightly together to form a roll. Allow one tomato and about half a cheese per person. Pour the dressing over the top. Decorate with a few leaves of basil.

Wonton Soup

Ingredients:

2 oz. Cooked ground pork
1/4 c Chopped scallions (green-onions)
2 tsp Teriyaki sauce
1/2 tsp Cornstarch
1/4 tsp Ground ginger
20 Wonton wrappers (3 x 3-inch squares)

SOUP:

2 3/4 qt Water, divided
3 Pkt instant chicken broth -and seasoning mix
1 c Shredded spinach
1/4 c Thinly sliced mushrooms

Preparations:

WONTONS: In small bowl combine pork, scallions, teriyaki sauce, cornstarch and ginger, mixing well. Spoon an equal amount of pork mixture (about 1/2 teaspoon) onto center of each wonton wrapper; moisten edges of wrappers with water and fold wrappers in half, triangle-fashion, enclosing filling and forming 20 wontons. Press edges together to seal; bring base corners of each triangle together, overlapping corners, and press to seal. Cover and refrigerate until ready to use.

SOUP: In 3-quart saucepan bring 2 quarts water to a boil. Add wontons and, when wontons rise to surface, cook for 1 minute longer. Using slotted spoon, remove wontons to plate and set aside. Discard cooking liquid. In 1-quart saucepan bring remaining 3 cups water to a boil; add broth mix and stir to dissolve. Add spinach and mushrooms and cook for 1 minute; add wontons and cook until heated through.

Makes 4 servings; about 3/4 cup soup and 5 wontons each.

Antipasto Pasta Salad

Prep Time: approx. 20 Min.

Cook Time: approx. 15 Min.

Ready in: approx. 1 Hour 35 Min.

Makes 12 servings.

Ingredients:

1 pound seashell pasta

1/4 pound Genoa salami, chopped

1/4 pound pepperoni sausage, chopped

1/2 pound Asiago cheese, diced

1 (6 ounce) can black olives, drained and chopped

1 red bell pepper, diced

1 green bell pepper, chopped

3 tomatoes, chopped

1 (.7 ounce) package dry Italian-style salad dressing mix

3/4 cup extra virgin olive oil

1/4 cup balsamic vinegar

2 tablespoons dried oregano

1 tablespoon dried parsley

1 tablespoon grated Parmesan cheese

salt and ground black pepper to taste

Preparations:

Cook the pasta in a large pot of salted boiling water until al dente. Drain, and cool under cold water. In a large bowl, combine the pasta, salami, pepperoni, Asiago cheese, black olives, red bell pepper, green bell pepper and tomatoes. Stir in the envelope of dressing mix. Cover, and refrigerate for at least one hour. To prepare the dressing, whisk together the olive oil, balsamic vinegar, oregano, parsley, Parmesan cheese, salt and pepper. Just before serving, pour dressing over the salad, and mix well.

Marinated Mushrooms

These mushrooms are great served on a salad or as a side dish. Prep Time: approx. 15 Min. Cook Time: approx. 10 Min. Ready in: approx. 25 Min. Makes 8 to 10 servings.

Ingredients:

1 cup red wine
1/2 cup red wine vinegar
1/3 cup olive oil
2 tablespoons brown sugar
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
1/4 cup red bell pepper, diced
1 pound small fresh mushrooms, washed and trimmed
1/4 cup chopped green onions
1/4 teaspoon dried oregano
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper

Preparations:

In a saucepan over medium heat, combine the wine, vinegar, oil, sugar, garlic, bell pepper, red pepper flakes and mushrooms. Bring to a boil, cover and set aside to cool. Once cooled, stir in the green onions, oregano, salt and pepper. Serve chilled or room temperature.

Broccoli Bites

Delicious bits of broccoli are drenched in a cheese mixture and fried. Prep Time: approx. 10 Min. Cook Time: approx. 10 Min. Ready in: approx. 20 Min. Makes 2 dozen (2 servings).

Ingredients:

3 tablespoons prepared Dijon-style mustard
4 tablespoons honey
2 cups broccoli florets
1 cup shredded Cheddar cheese
1 egg
1 cup milk
1/2 cup sifted all-purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon vegetable oil
1/2 cup vegetable oil for frying

Preparations:

To make the sauce: In a small bowl, stir together the mustard and honey. Set aside. Chop florets into small pieces or pulse lightly in food processor. Toss in a mixing bowl with shredded cheese. Set aside. Beat egg and stir in the milk. Sift flour, baking powder, and salt together and combine them with the egg and milk mixture, beating well. Beat in 1/2 teaspoon oil as well. Pour mixture over broccoli and cheese and toss to coat well. In a large skillet or saucepan heat oil to 375 degrees F (190 degrees C). Drop broccoli mixture by spoonfuls into 375 degrees F (190 degrees C) oil and fry until golden brown. Serve with honey mustard sauce.

Coconut Shrimp

Prep Time: approx. 10 Mins.
Cook Time: approx. 20 Min.
Ready in: approx. 1 Hour .
Makes 4 servings.

Ingredients:

1 egg
1/2 cup all-purpose flour
2/3 cup beer
1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder

1/4 cup all-purpose flour
2 cups flaked coconut
24 shrimp
3 cups oil for frying

Preparations:

In medium bowl, combine egg, 1/2 cup flour, beer and baking powder. Place 1/4 cup flour and coconut in two separate bowls. Hold shrimp by tail, and dredge in flour, shaking off excess flour. Dip in egg/beer batter; allow excess to drip off. Roll shrimp in coconut, and place on a baking sheet lined with wax paper. Refrigerate for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, Heat oil to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C) in a deep-fryer. Fry shrimp in batches: cook, turning once, for 2 to 3 minutes, or until golden brown. Using tongs, remove shrimp to paper towels to drain. Serve warm with your favorite dipping sauce.

Main Dishes

Chicken Marsala

(Serves about 4)

Ingredients:

1/8 tsp. pepper
1/4 tsp. salt
1 1/2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken cutlets slice and flattened thin All-Purpose flour for coating
1 stick butter or margarine
1 cup Marsala wine

Preparation:

Mix together the flour salt and pepper. Coat the chicken well. In a large skillet, sauté in the butter over a medium-high heat until golden. Cook in a single layer. Pour wine into skillet and cook for about two more minutes. Serve immediately.

Sweet and Sour Chicken

Ingredients:

3/4 lb Chicken breast - skinless, boneless
1 tbs Rice wine or dry sherry
1 tbs Light soy sauce
1/2 tsp Salt
1 sm Green bell pepper
1 sm Red bell pepper
1 Carrot
2 Scallions
1 Egg, beaten
2 tbs Cornstarch
2 c Oil, preferably peanut
1 fresh orange in segments

SAUCE

2/3 c Chicken stock
1 tbs Light soy sauce
1/2 tsp Salt
1 1/2 tbs Chinese white rice vinegar or cider vinegar
1 tbs Sugar
1 tbs Tomato paste
1 tsp Cornstarch
1 tsp Water

Preparation:

Cut the chicken into 1-inch cubes. Put the cubes into a bowl together with the rice wine or sherry, 1 tablespoon of light soy sauce and 1/2 teaspoon salt, and marinate for 20 minutes.

Cut the green and red peppers into 1-inch squares. Peel and cut the carrots and scallions into 1-inch chunks. Bring a pot of water to a boil and blanch the carrots in it for 4 minutes, then drain and set aside. Mix the egg and cornstarch in a bowl until they are well blended into a batter. Lift the chicken cubes out of the marinade, put them into a batter and coat each piece well. Heat the oil in a deep-fat fryer or large wok until it is almost smoking. Remove the chicken pieces from

the batter with a slotted spoon and deep-fry them. Drain the deep-fried chicken cubes on paper towels.

THE SAUCE: Combine the chicken stock, soy sauce, salt, vinegar, sugar and tomato paste in a large saucepan. Bring it to a boil. Add all the vegetables, but not the oranges, and stir well. In a small bowl, blend together the cornstarch and water. Stir this mixture into the sauce, and bring it back to a boil. Turn the heat down to a simmer. Add the oranges and chicken cubes. Mix well, then turn the mixture onto a deep platter. Serve at once.

Cajun Chicken Pasta

Prep Time: approx. 20 Min.

Cook Time: approx. 20 Min.

Ready in: approx. 40 Min.

Makes 2 servings.

Ingredients:

4 ounces linguine pasta
2 skinless, boneless chicken breast halves
2 teaspoons Cajun seasoning
2 tablespoons butter
1 red bell pepper, sliced
1 green bell pepper, sliced
4 fresh mushrooms, sliced
1 green onion, chopped
2 cups heavy cream
1/4 teaspoon dried basil
1/4 teaspoon lemon pepper
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon garlic powder
1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper
1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese

Preparations:

Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to a boil. Add pasta and cook for 8 to 10 minutes or until al dente; drain. Place the chicken and the Cajun seasoning in a plastic bag. Shake to coat. In a large skillet over medium heat, sauté the chicken in butter or margarine until almost tender (5 to 7 minutes). Add the red bell pepper, green bell pepper, mushrooms and green onion. Sauté and stir for 2 to 3 minutes. Reduce heat. Add the cream, basil, lemon pepper, salt, garlic powder and ground black pepper. Heat through. Add the cooked linguine, toss and heat through. Sprinkle with grated Parmesan cheese and serve.

Chicken Jambalaya

Prep Time: approx. 15 Min.

Cook Time: approx. 25 Min.

Ready in: approx. 45 Min.

Makes 6 servings.

Ingredients:

1 tablespoon canola oil

3 onions, diced

3 green bell peppers, diced

1/2 cup water, divided

4 skinless, boneless chicken breast halves – cubed

2 (14.5 ounce) cans whole peeled tomatoes, chopped, juice reserved

garlic powder to taste

onion powder to taste

chili powder to taste

2 cups uncooked instant rice

Preparations:

Heat oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Sauté onions and peppers for 5 minutes. Pour in 1/4 cup of water and add chicken. Cook 15 minutes, or until chicken is cooked. To the chicken add the tomatoes, with juice, remaining water, garlic powder, onion powder and chili powder. Simmer 5 minutes. Stir in rice, cover and remove from heat. Let stand 5 minutes. Mix well and serve.

Beef Bourguignon

A little more advanced, but an excellent meal.

Prep Time: approx. 30 Min.

Cook Time: approx. 3 Hours .

Ready in: approx. 1 Hours 30 Min.

Makes 4 servings.

Ingredients:

3 cups Burgundy wine
2 tablespoons brandy
2 onions, thinly sliced
2 carrots, chopped
1 sprig of fresh parsley
1 bay leaf
1 clove crushed garlic
10 whole black peppercorns
1 teaspoon salt
2 pounds cubed beef chuck roast
4 tablespoons olive oil, divided
1/4 pound bacon, cubed
2 onions, chopped
3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon tomato paste
2 cloves crushed garlic
1 (10.5 ounce) can beef broth
salt and pepper to taste
4 tablespoons butter
1 pound fresh mushrooms, sliced

Preparations:

For marinade: In a large bowl, combine the wine, cognac, onions, carrots, parsley, bay leaf, garlic, peppercorns and salt. Mix well and add the cubed beef. Cover and marinate in the refrigerator for 2 days. Preheat oven to 300 degrees F

(150 degrees C). For Bourguignon: Strain the meat from the vegetables and marinade; reserve marinade. Dry meat with paper towels. Heat 2 tablespoons of the oil in a large skillet over medium high heat. Add the meat and sauté for 10 minutes, or until browned on all sides. Transfer meat to a separate medium bowl with a slotted spoon and set aside. In the same skillet, add the bacon and sauté until lightly browned. Transfer the bacon to the bowl with the meat. Drain the skillet and return it to the heat. Pour a cup of marinade into the skillet to deglaze the skillet, scraping the bottom to loosen up all the little bits. Return this liquid to the reserved marinade. Heat the remaining oil in the skillet. Add the onion and carrot from the marinade, along with the additional onion that you've chopped, and sauté for 5 minutes, or until tender. Transfer this mixture to the bowl with the meat and bacon, again using a slotted spoon, and return skillet to the heat. Add the flour to the skillet, combining with the oil and stir until well mixed and brown, about 2 minutes. Now add the tomato paste, garlic, beef broth, reserved marinade and salt and pepper to taste. Bring to a boil and whisk to remove any flour lumps. Add this to the meat and vegetable mixture. Place entire mixture into a 9x13 baking dish. Bake at 300 degrees F (150 degrees C) for 3 hours, stirring occasionally and adding water as needed. Season with salt and pepper to taste. About 15 minutes before meat is done baking, melt butter in the skillet over medium high heat. Add the mushrooms and sauté for 5 to 10 minutes, or until lightly browned. When meat is done, add the mushrooms to the meat mixture, stir well and let sit for about 15 minutes.

Beef Parmesan with Garlic Angel Hair Pasta

This is a great, inexpensive alternative to veal parmesan! Makes 4 servings.

Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 pounds beef cube steak
- 1 onion, sliced into thin rings
- 1 green bell pepper, sliced in rings
- 1 cup Italian seasoned bread crumbs
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 (16 ounce) jar spaghetti sauce

1/2 cup shredded mozzarella cheese
12 ounces angel hair pasta
2 teaspoons minced garlic
1/4 cup butter

Preparations:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). Cut cube steak into serving size pieces. Coat meat with the bread crumbs and parmesan cheese. Heat olive oil in a large frying pan, and sauté 1 teaspoon of the garlic for 3 minutes. Quick fry (brown quickly on both sides) meat. Place meat in a casserole baking dish, slightly overlapping edges. Place onion rings and peppers on top of meat, and pour marinara sauce over all. Bake at 350 degrees F (175 degrees C) for 30 to 45 minutes, depending on the thickness of the meat. Sprinkle mozzarella over meat and leave in the oven till bubbly. Boil pasta al dente. Drain, and toss in butter and 1 teaspoon garlic. For a stronger garlic taste, season with garlic powder. Top with grated parmesan and parsley for color. Serve meat and sauce atop a mound of pasta! HINT: make the meat ahead of time, and refrigerate over night, the acid in the tomato sauce will tenderize the meat even more. If you do this, save the mozzarella till the last minute.

Side Dishes

Italian-Style Broccoli

Ingredients:

2 lb Broccoli, broken into florets
1 tb Olive oil
1 Clove garlic, minced or put through press
1 sm Dried hot red pepper, crumbled
2 tb Dry white wine

Preparation:

Steam broccoli 10 minutes, or until tender and still bright green. Rinse under cold water. Heat olive oil over medium heat and sauté garlic and red pepper 2

minutes. Add broccoli and wine and sauté, stirring, another 3 to 5 minutes. Serve. Serves 4 to 6.

Garlic-Wine Rice Pilaf

Ingredients:

1 Tablespoon Lemon Rind
8 Each Cloves Garlic, Peeled
1/2 Cup Parsley
6 Tablespoons Unsalted Butter
1 Cup Regular Rice (Not Instant)
1 1/4 Cups Chicken Stock
3/4 Cup Dry Vermouth
Salt & Pepper To Taste

Preparation:

Chop together the lemon rind, garlic and parsley. Heat the butter in heavy 2-qt pot. Cook the garlic mixture very gently for 10 minutes. Stir in the rice. Stir over medium heat for 2 minutes. Combine the stock and wine in a saucepan. Heat until it begins to bubble at the sides. Stir into rice; add salt and freshly ground pepper. Cover tightly and simmer over very low heat for 20 minutes or until liquid is absorbed and rice is tender. Fluff with a fork. Drape a towel over the pot and cover the towel until it is time to serve. Serve hot or at room temperature.

Bella's Rosemary Red Potatoes

Ingredients:

6 red potatoes, scrubbed and cut into wedges
3 tablespoons butter, melted

3 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 tablespoon chopped fresh rosemary
salt and pepper to taste

Preparation:

Preheat oven to 375 degrees F (190 degrees C). Mix together melted butter and oil, then pour into a 9x13 inch baking dish. Place the potatoes into the dish, and stir until coated. Sprinkle with rosemary, salt, and pepper. Cover with aluminum foil. Bake in the preheated oven for 30 minutes, or until the potatoes are tender. Stir the potatoes occasionally to ensure even cooking.

Herbed Garlic Mashed Potatoes

Ingredients:

1 medium head garlic
1/2 cup low fat, low sodium chicken broth
3 potatoes, peeled and cubed
1 cup warm skim milk
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon dried thyme
1/2 teaspoon dried rosemary, crushed
salt and pepper to taste

Preparation:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). Slice the top off the head of garlic to expose the cloves. Place the whole head and the broth in a small casserole dish and cover. Bake for 1 hour; remove dish from the oven and set aside. Boil the cubed potatoes in water for 20 minutes or until soft. Drain. Add the warm milk and olive oil. Beat with mixer until potatoes are fluffy. Add the herbs. Gently squeeze the garlic out from each of the cloves, leaving behind the skins. Add all the garlic pulp to the potatoes. Beat again and season with salt and pepper.

Desserts

Tiramisu

(This one is more intermediate than beginner)

Ingredients:

6 Eggs, separated
1 1/4c Granulated sugar
1 1/2c Mascarpone cheese (or substitute below)
24 Lady fingers, split lengthwise
3/4c Hot water
2 tsp Instant coffee granules
1/4c Brandy
2 tb Brandy
1 2/3 c Whipping cream, whipped
4 oz Bittersweet chocolate, coarsely grated
3 tb Cocoa powder
Extra whipping cream for garnish

MASCARPONE CHEESE SUBSTITUTE

16 oz Cream cheese (2 8 oz. packages)
1/3 c Sour cream
2 Ounces (1/4 cup) whipping cream

Arrange half the lady fingers in the bottom of a 9 x 13 pan. Mix hot water with instant coffee granules and 2 Tbs brandy. Pour 1/2 this mixture gently over lady fingers. Set aside.

Make a zabliogne by beating the egg yolks and sugar in the top of a double boiler until ivory colored. Add 1/4 C. brandy and whisk until the mixture starts to thicken - 8-10 minutes. Let cool a little. Stir constantly while cooking.

Carefully mix zabliogne with mascarpone cheese. It will appear to be quite liquid. Whip the egg whites until very stiff and fold into zabliogne /mascarpone mixture.

Pour 1/2 zabliogne mixture over the lady fingers, which have been soaking up the coffee/brandy mixture. Top with 1/2 whipped cream. Sprinkle with 1/2 of cocoa powder and 1/2 of grated chocolate.

Place balance of lady fingers on top of this to create a second layer. Pour remaining coffee mixture carefully over these lady fingers. Then repeat layers; zabliogne, whipped cream, cocoa powder and grated chocolate. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate till set. It is best if left over-night. When ready to serve, decorate with piped-on whipped cream around the edges and more chocolate and/or cocoa powder if desired. Yield 10-12 servings, depending on the size you cut them. It is quite rich so you might consider smaller sized pieces.

MASCARPONE CHEESE SUBSTITUTE Mascarpone cheese is sold in Italian delis, cheese shops and specialty food markets. It is somewhat difficult to find and very expensive. From Southern Living Magazine comes this substitute for mascarpone:

Blend three ingredients well, until it becomes somewhat light and fluffy. This will make the equivalent of about 2 1/2 cups of cheese. Substitute in equal amounts - 1 cup substitute for 1 cup mascarpone.

Black Forest Cheesecake

Ingredients:

1 c Chocolate Wafer Crumbs
3 T Margarine, Melted
16 oz Cream Cheese Softened
2/3 c Sugar
2 Large Eggs
6 oz Semi-sweet Chocolate Chips
1/4 t Almond Extract
21 oz Cherry Pie Filling (1 Can)
1 x Frozen Whipped Topping Thawed
Chocolate Chips should be melted

Preparation:

Combine crumbs and margarine, press onto bottom of 9-inch springform pan. Bake at 350 degrees F., 10 minutes. Combine cream cheese and sugar, mixing at medium speed on electric mixer until well blended. Add eggs, one at a time, mixing well after each addition. Blend in chocolate and extract; pour over crust. Bake at 350 degrees F., 45 minutes. Loosen cake from rim of pan; cool before removing rim of pan. Chill. Top cheesecake with pie filling and whipped topping just before serving.

Ambrosia Trifle

(This recipe courtesy of [Doug Davis](#))

Ingredients:

1 (5.1 ounce) package vanilla instant pudding
3 cups milk
2 tablespoons frozen orange juice concentrate, thawed
1 (8-ounce) carton sour cream
1 (28-ounce) package frozen golden pineapple coconut cake, partially thawed (Pepperidge Farm recommended)
1 (15-ounce) can mandarin orange segments, drained
1-1/2 cup frozen whipped topping, thawed
Garnishes: shredded coconut, stemmed maraschino cherries

Preparation:

In a large bowl combine pudding, milk, orange juice concentrate, and sour cream, beat at low speed with electric mixer 2 minutes or until thickened. Spoon one-third of pudding into a 3-quart trifle bowl. Cut coconut cake in half lengthwise. Cut cake halves crosswise into 1/2-inch slices. Arrange one-third of cake slices in a single layer over pudding. Arrange one-third of mandarin orange segments over cake. Arrange half of remaining cake slices over orange segments. Cover cake with half of remaining pudding; top with remaining cake slices and half of remaining orange segments. Top with remaining pudding and orange segments. Mound whipped topping over trifle. Garnish, if desired. Cover and

chill several hours. Yield: 12-14 servings. (Put the trifle together that night, all except the cherries, and set the bowl down into a cooler so the flavors could blend overnight. Take it out just before serving and add the cherries to the top. If you cannot find pineapple coconut cake, coconut cake alone will work. Just layer in a can of very well drained crushed pineapple to the layers of mandarin oranges.)

Blueberry Cream Cheese Squares

(This recipe courtesy of [Doug Davis](#))

Ingredients:

1/4 cup corn starch
1/2 cup water
13 ounce package graham cracker crumbs
2 (8 ounce) package cream cheese
9 ounce package frozen whipped topping, thawed
1/2 cup sugar
3 cups blueberries, rinsed and drained
3/4 cup melted butter
1-1/2 cups sugar
2 teaspoons vanilla

Preparation:

In a saucepan combine cornstarch, sugar, water and blueberries. Cook over medium heat stirring until thickened; cool. Combine cracker crumbs and butter; press half the crumbs into bottom of foil-lined 13 x 9 x 2-inch pan. Mash cream cheese until soft; beat in sugar and vanilla gradually. Fold in whipped topping; drop spoonfuls over crumbs mixture. Spread gently with spatula. Spread blueberry filling over cheese mixture; spread with remaining cheese mixture. Sprinkle with remaining crumbs mixture. Chill overnight. Yields 15 servings.

NOTE: As I said earlier, this is not meant to be a recipe book. These are just a few that I have used at dinner parties and have enjoyed success with. A quick

visit to my resource page and you will find a few recipe books to download and use. Also, visit the links in the resource section of this ebook for more excellent sites.

Resources

Basic Food and Recipe Sites

[Kitchen Link](#)

[The Recipe Source](#) Over 70,000 recipe's – fully searchable!

[Home and Garden TV](#)

[Gourmet Tips](#)

[Cooking Tips](#)

Wine Sites

[Into Wine](#)

[Wine Enthusiast](#)

[Wine Spectator](#)

[Food and Wine](#)

[Learn2 - Choose a Wine](#)

Menu Planning

[Beginner Menu Planning](#)

[Learn2 - Host a Dinner Party](#)

[Good Hosting](#)

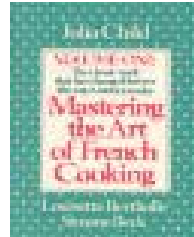
Cookbooks

These are *some* of my favorite cookbooks. Over the many parties I've thrown, a few have been invaluable to me.

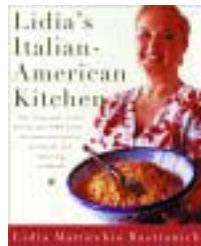
[The All New Joy of Cooking](#)



[Mastering the Art of French Cooking](#)



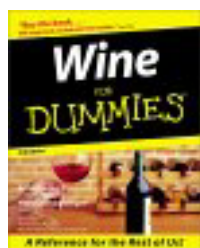
[Lidia's Italian American Kitchen](#)



[Grilling America](#)



[Wine for Dummies](#)



[At Home Entertaining](#)



[Mexico – The Beautiful Cookbook](#)



[Betty Crocker's New Chinese Cookbook](#)



Other Recommended Items

Whether you're in the kitchen or on the patio, here's a few things you'll get a lot of use out of:

[The Charcoal Companion Set](#)



[Three Piece Wine Saver Set](#)



[Cuisinart 4-Piece Stainless Steel Cookware](#)



[Anolon 10-Piece Non-Stick Cookware Set](#)



[Another eBookWholesaler Publication](#)