

brunch time

Wake up your friends with delicious new twists on traditional morning favorites.



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MENU

- Goat-Cheese-and-Chive Popovers
- Fruit Smoothies
- Mixed-Berry French Toast
- Breakfast Pizza

SERVE IT WITH STYLE

A buffet table allows guests to help themselves. It also lets you enjoy the party without having to pass dishes around.

- **Stop traffic.** Set up your buffet against a wall, away from your dining tables or seating areas. Guests will enjoy their meal more when they're not being bumped by people getting food. But don't go too far—no one will go back for seconds!
- **Arrange smartly.** Group napkins, plates, and cutlery at one end. Have extras on hand, since guests often grab a new plate when they go back for seconds. Make sure each dish has its own serving spoon.
- **Place dishes in order.** Start your buffet with salads and breads, then your main course, followed by dessert.
- **Keep it simple.** A small vase of flowers or a single burning candle is all you need.
- **Make a place for drinks.** Separate food and beverage areas, so guests don't have to dodge each other going from one spot to the next.

The idea of a girls-only brunch was born when Joyce Sorenson wanted to find a way to welcome spring. Living in a place like Madison, Wisconsin—where the winter temperatures often reach a frigid 16 degrees—the promise of warmer weather is reason enough to throw a party.

"I love cooking for my friends," says Joyce, who owns her own fitness studio in Madison. "It's one of my favorite things to do."

Joyce kept her time-crunched lifestyle in mind when planning this brunch, coming up with a menu of easy-to-make dishes requiring minimal prep time. For instance, she simply pulled out cubed and frozen fruit that she already had in her freezer to make an assortment of fruit smoothies that guests enjoyed upon arrival. "I always buy more fruit than I can eat," she says. "So I've started freezing it before it spoils so I can use it for these smoothies, or for desserts."

Once everyone had arrived, they helped themselves to berry-topped French toast, which she'd made earlier in the day and kept warm in the oven. Other tasty buffet choices included goat-cheese-and-chive popovers, and a breakfast pizza topped with eggs and prosciutto (a kind of Italian bacon).

"The breakfast pizza is so much more colorful and fun than a typical casserole," says Joyce, adding, "but I should have baked a few more batches of the popovers, because everyone went wild for them." Her girlfriends still ask her how to make the savory herbed butters that she served with them.

"I've learned that when it comes to entertaining, simple is the way to go," she says.

SMOOTH TALKER

Joyce treated guests to delicious fruit drinks from her smoothie bar, each garnished with chunks of fresh berries or pineapple. Peach-banana-orange shake, anyone?



BRUNCH POINTERS

To make sure your brunch runs smoothly, follow these helpful entertaining ideas:

- **Make your favorites.** Now's not the time to try impressing friends with some exotic dish you've never made. Tried-and-true is the order of the day.
- **Stay out of the kitchen.** Joyce had the right idea when she selected foods that could be made ahead of time. Do the same, giving yourself the chance to spend more time with your guests.
- **Send invitations.** In this age of E-mail, isn't it nice to receive a paper invite in the mail? If people don't RSVP, call them! You need to know how many are coming so you can prepare the right amount of food.
- **Create ambience.** Joyce got her party started with soft jazz. But by the end of the afternoon, her friends were tapping their feet to the Rolling Stones.
- **Serve it hot.** Plan to serve your main meal a half hour after your scheduled start time. This gives guests enough time to arrive fashionably late and still enjoy the food while it's hot. Prepare an easy appetizer or two for punctual guests.
- **Find shortcuts.** There's nothing wrong with using store-bought crudité, dip, and cheese platters. Cut-up fruit from your grocer is an easy shortcut for smoothies or fruit salad.
- **Don't take it too seriously.** Face it, something's bound to go wrong. Just remember: It's only a party.





FLOWER POWER

Flowers are a wonderful, cheery way to add quick style to a party. Here's how to create fabulous arrangements, and make sure they last long after the party's over:

- **Don't limit yourself** to prearranged bouquets of mixed flowers. Pick one or two varieties you love (Joyce favored apricot-hued tulips and white ranunculus), and buy several large bunches. Letting each bloom stand on its own makes for a dramatic focal point.
- **Before arranging**, trim stems and remove lower leaves. They will stay fresher longer.
- **If you've chosen roses**, trim the stems under water. You should also remove the bloom's protective outer petals. (The best ones are inside.)
- **For tulips**, adding a few pennies to the water will make them last longer and stand straighter.
- **Use the unusual.** Instead of vases, Joyce chose an antique tin bucket and several ceramic water pitchers to hold arrangements. You can also use old mason jars, glazed flowerpots, a wicker basket (with a glass bottle inside), or a teapot.
- **To keep things fresh**, change the water and recut stems every couple of days. This is the most important tip of all, if you want your blooms to last.

MAKING A SCENE

Joyce will be the first to tell you that a successful get-together is a marriage of good food and lots of fun. With the food portion taken care of, she set about creating a lively yet relaxing atmosphere for her guests to enjoy.

"I usually have lots more people here when I throw a party," she says. "We push all the furniture to the sides of the room, roll up the rug, and let everyone dance. But this time around, I liked the idea of having just my closest friends hanging out for the afternoon."

While this springtime brunch offered no dancing, it did present a need for lots of seating and eating areas. Joyce pushed her living room furniture closer together and pulled her dining table into the room's corner.

In her now-empty dining room, she placed two folding tables against the far wall. "All the entertaining I've done has taught me that folding tables are a necessity," she says. Topped with a beautiful cloth, nobody ever knows what's underneath, like the breakable items that need to be stored in a safe place.

Joyce set her smoothie bar up on an antique dry sink, stocked with plenty of glasses, large bowls of chopped fruit—and the blender, so people could make their own. The idea was to keep it separate, which prevented the buffet table from getting overcrowded.

The final touch? "I always put a wide mix of music on the CD player," she says. "I try to put on something for everyone—this crowd loves all kinds of jazz."

