

Potluck with Purpose



Years ago, I got turned off by potlucks. The ones I attended didn't work very well. No one did anything to organize what people brought so when you got your food and sat down to eat, nothing was coordinated. The food didn't taste as good as it could because so many things were competing for your taste buds' attention. It made me sad. People worked so hard on their dishes.

The other thing that happened was there was no balance. One time there'd be way too many desserts, only one or two sides, and maybe even no entrée. Or there'd be three vegetable trays with a dip that clearly all came from the same deli counter. So much food got wasted that way.

One year I decided that I was going to need some help in putting on a dinner party, so I asked people to bring a dish. I asked them to bring a dish that had a family history. It should be something their family made during the holidays that had a story to go with it.

I asked them to let me know what they were bringing so I could make sure we had a balanced buffet and see if I needed to make anything to round out the offerings.

This turned out to be a great idea for a few reasons.

Under the balance category, I had no fewer than three people tell me they wanted to bring mac and cheese. Well, if I had not asked that I would have had a buffet FULL of mac and cheese and not much else. So the first person to offer it up was given that deed and the others were asked to come up with Plan B. That was easy.

A couple of people brought desserts. A couple brought appetizers and the others brought side dishes. I was able to make just a couple of things to make sure the vegetarians and vegans in the crowd had enough to eat. I also provided shaved rare roast beef and turkey from the deli so everyone got a protein option. They could go low carb with it or I provided little buns and toppings so they could make sliders. That turned out to be the entrée. We had plenty of food but not massive amounts of anything that had to go to waste.

Before I served dinner, I gathered everyone around the buffet. This was my favorite part. I asked each person in turn to tell the story of what they brought. This got everyone to speak up and participate but it was the stories that were so grand. Each person had a funny or touching story to tell. Everyone in the room got to know a little bit about the family histories of those gathered and it kicked off dinner with a delightful opening.

I thought the hints in here might give you some direction for your next potluck, especially during the holiday season.

Cheers,

Zola



Thai Basil Chicken

This dish will be ready in about 20 minutes. All you have to do is a little chopping.