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The Holiday Party: Getting Creative with Appetizers and Sandwiches

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Meghna Lamore

Ah, the wonders of holiday entertaining. The family, the friends. The sparkly decorations, the tree ornaments. The endless lists, the stress.

Most of us host some sort of holiday gathering, whether it be a full-blown party on a single date rescued from everyone's calendars or a family celebration four days long. Regardless of the length of the event or the theme, there is always one common theme: food.

Holiday parties run the gamut from sedate, sit-down, multi-course dinners to loud, raucous free-for-alls with guests - and beverages - spilling all over the place. Regardless of where exactly in this range your own celebrations fall, my post today hopes to give you two simple, stress-free ideas that will impress even as they lower your blood pressure.



Mini quiches can be a delightful dish to serve

Finger Food: I am the goddess of the Finger Food Party. Invariably, whenever I get a number of people gathered in my home, I resort to small bites and hors d'oeuvres to accommodate my guests' appetites. I find that not only do they take up less space per unit of food (25 cocktail bites arranged neatly on a plate takes up less space than 25 dinner-sized portions of the same food), they enable guests to wander around and mingle with other guests without so much of a danger of spilling fussy food. The key to the Finger Food party is to have plenty of minimum-prep options. It doesn't take a lot of time to put together some salmon bites, for instance: all you need is a package of crackers, another of smoked salmon and some cream cheese. A pinch of paprika (or chili pepper, if your guests are brave) to top it off and you've a very satisfying plate ready. Fruit and cheese plates are always classic staples, as are store-bought mini-quiches (thank you, Costco!). Finger sandwiches are also always a popular option, and very easy to pull off if you've some helpers on hand to set up an assembly line to make them: two or three people to layer fillings, one to cut into triangles and a last to arrange the results on a decorative platter.



Artisan breads can compliment a gourmet sandwich bar

The Gourmet Sandwich Bar: a clever expansion on the theme of finger sandwiches, the Gourmet Sandwich Bar scorns most cold-cuts and tasteless cheese slices, and instead takes the entire affair up a couple of very important levels. Quality, not quantity, is the key to this arrangement. Instead of the usual mayo-mustard-dill pickle combination, why not try a herbed or garlic mayonnaise and artisan mustards? Instead of run-of-the-mill meats, take a page out of my husband's book and try a baked fish and pulled pork. To ensure that you don't create more work for yourself instead of less, make the pulled pork in a slow cooker and put the slowcooker right onto the buffet table, plugged in. There's no need to slice the cheeses for this bar: simply arrange the blocks and wedges of cheese on a hardy platter, such as a wooden cutting board or server, and add several different knives. The same principle applies to the breads: instead of mass-produced sliced bread, pick up a few loaves of artisanal breads at your local baker or specialty boulangerie, and lay those on the tables with a bread knife. The rustic visual appeal of this set-up creates the wow factor, and your guests have the added involvement - and fun - of slicing, dicing and combining themselves... leaving you in the clear.

As for my own holiday party, coming up this next weekend, I hope to incorporate both of these ideas: we will have our rustic - but gourmet! - sandwich bar, and also a small number of hors d'oeuvres scattered about the house. Good luck with your own celebrations, and I wish you a wonderful holiday season!

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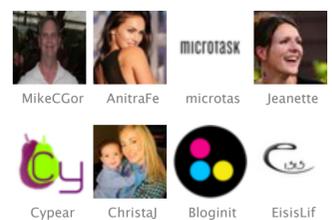
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