

Planning a Feast

Kitchen requirements:

One full sized stove, minimum, two if serving more than 80

One full sized refrigerator, two if it is summer and you are serving more than 50

Plenty of counter space and a large kitchen table to work at

At least one **double** sink

Plenty of pots and pans, cleaning supplies, utensils, serving dishes, baggies, garbage bags, tea towels, dish cloths, scrubbies

Logistics and Planning:

1) Do not plan to do lunch and dinner! Do one or the other, coordinate your menus to avoid overlap, and schedule times for each to be in and out of the kitchen

2) line up volunteers - kitchen staff, dishwashers, servers (or at least a head server), clean up crew. Don't sell yourself short. You will need at least 3-4 helpers for a 50-60 person feast, and one deputy that knows everything in case you drop dead.

3) One month ahead, have planned your menu with:

 expected number of guests

 expected number of complementary or reduced budget feasts (royalty or nobility, servers, kitchen staff, children)

 break-even number of guests for the budget

 Absolute cut-off date for adjusting numbers (downwards only - do not be bullied into trying to feed extra people at the last minute!)

4) Cook as much in advance of the feast as possible. Do not waste your day chopping and peeling, and do not think you can buy the best fresh goods the day of the feast!

5) You can arrange advance cooking by farming it out to others, providing both ingredients and detailed recipes. You can also arrange pre-cook days in groups at someone's home. This is a good way for novice cooks to learn so they can move up to handling farmed-out dishes in future.

Budget:

1) Calculate the lowest number of attendees by the number of attendees expected to show (e.g. 40)

2) Subtract the number of complementary people (e.g. 10)

3) Multiply the net amount by the average feast fee (e.g. \$13). This will give you \$390 to spend on your feast. Put aside \$30 for last minute items. This gives you \$360 to spend on 40 people, or around \$9 per person. For every eight people who reserve over your original budget, you can add one more meat dish and a few extras such as cheese, fresh fruit, etc.

4) Always, always keep receipts!

5) Encourage people to pay early, and do not use your own money to pay for the feast (or at least keep that to a minimum).

6) NEVER spend more than the actual expected feast revenue, and buy food "as you go, with the things that can be frozen or made in advance first.

7) Based on 10 dishes in your feast, three of them protein, NO dish should cost more than \$2.00 per person per serving. Many must cost substantially less.

Menu Planning:

- 1) Plan your menu in increments of eight, as that is the usual number of people sitting at one table.
- 2) A good basic feast can be presented to two removes of five dishes each. If you expect over 60 feasters, you can expand to 12 dishes and/or some extras on the table. Stick to two removes, with not more than 15 minutes between them, to cut down on people coming and going from the hall.
- 3) Allow a minimum of ½ pound of protein per person, 2/3 of that in meat form. Most people will be hungrier than normal from fighting or forgetting to eat lunch, and this amount of protein is equivalent to two quarter pound hamburgers. Don't forget that cheese, eggs (eg in a quiche) and lentils are all proteins.
- 4) Plan your menu around what's in season. Take advantage of specials. Chicken, Pork or ham are usually the cheapest meats to serve, especially in stew form. Allow 1/3 pound per feaster for chicken, and 1/4 lb or more for denser meat such as beef. Serve this kind of dish at the beginning of the meals to reassure picky feasters.
- 5) Dame Enid's Rule of Feast Vegetables: Halve the number of expected diners. Allow one very small portion of vegetables for this number of people. As far as Society people go, "fish is vegetables."
- 6) Siglinde's Rule of Fish: Make half as much fish as vegetables. Make enough to serve two people at each table. That will probably be enough, as the other six will prefer not to try it.
- 7) Limit the number of exotic foods: two out of ten is plenty. Test recipes in advance *especially the exotic ones!*
- 8) Vary your starches - bread, pastries, barley, kasha, bulgur, rice, noodles.
- 9) Don't try to do fussy dishes like fritters or pancakes - it's just too much work when you are trying to get things onto many tables in a hurry.

On the Day:

- 1) Post your recipes, timing and procedures for the feast on the walls in the kitchen.
- 2) Ensure that no-one except volunteers come into your kitchen. You can't be dealing with complaints, requests for water, toilets, etc.
- 3) Eat lunch! Seriously.
- 4) Start the feast on time!
- 5) Having food such as bread, butter, cheese, eggs, or raw vegetables on the table before everyone sits down is a good way to get things going even if you aren't quite ready to serve hot dishes
- 6) Have kitchen staff wash serving dishes and used pots as the feast progresses.
- 7) Make sure you have enough garbage bags to clear unwanted food from feasters' dishes. If you have a stock of plastic bags so people can take home their dirty dishes, that is much appreciated and will save you from clogged bathroom sinks.
- 8) Final cleanup is someone else's job. Make sure you know who it is, and make sure you track personal or canton equipment, but then get out of the way and relax.

These notes owe much to Dame Enid and Dame Tsivia, who wrote a guideline for cooks in the 1985 edition of The Known World Handbook.

Menus:

- 1) Avoid potatoes, tomatoes, pumpkins, most squashes, turkey and all beans and peas except Fava beans and field (green) peas. These are New World foods.
- 2) Avoid dishes in cream sauces (classic French cooking, which is later than the SCA period)
- 3) Traditional or classic dishes that avoid the above ingredients are probably just fine. They may not be absolutely period, but not everyone at a feast is an obsessive foodie. They just want to eat a good, tasty meal.
- 4) As you get more experienced and want to play with redacting period recipes, a good way to do this is to find a recipe that looks a bit like a modern recipe. One of my favourites is Krapfen, from *Der Guter Spiese*. Basically, it's an apple pie with other fruits added. I developed a recipe using basic instructions for an apple pie, but added in the other fruits and spices, adjusting the number of apples and basic pie spices until I got something I liked. A good rule of thumb when reading a medieval recipe is that ingredients are generally listed in order of the amounts used:

Gruel Enriched: Take oatmeal, and grind it small, and seethe it well, and pork therein, and pull off the skin and pick out the bones, and then hew it, and grind it small in a mortar; then take thine gruel and put thereto, then strain it through a strainer, and put it in a pot and seethe it a little, and salt it evenly; and color it with saffron, and serve forth running. (Take a Thousand Eggs or More, Vol 2, p 239)

Take a fair bit of oatmeal, and cook it (one cup with 4 ½ c water?) , then add some skinless boneless pork that has been cut up tiny and then ground (1-2 boneless pork chops?). Strain the mixture through a strainer (maybe to make sure it is all the same fine consistency?), then simmer it with the oatmeal and possibly some extra water or broth for a bit. Add 1 tsp salt and colour with a few threads of saffron. It should be a bit runny when served.

Bibliography of Some Favourite Sources for Redacted Recipes

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