

Entertaining a Festive Occasion

Christmas is in the air, and the special spirit that fills the air is everywhere. It is mixed with the aroma of mince meat, anise and cinnamon. It is obvious as it glistens from the holiday dishes and crystal on our prettiest holiday tables; it is twinkling at us from the star at the top of the tree to the fresh green wreaths that greet us at the front door. That special spirit will surround us with festive joy as it takes us closer to the twenty fifth.

Entertaining during the holiday should be a festive occasion, where the house takes on this special glow, and where old friends as well as new gather to exchange greetings of good cheer. Why not consider giving a new twist to this year's holiday party by celebrating around a special event? Start a new tradition.

A good way to gather friends together for a joyous evening and at the same time spread holiday cheer to others is a caroling party. Down through the years, wassailing or caroling has become a cherished Yuletide tradition, one which you will want to repeat every year. Groups of carolers toast each other with rings of hot, spicy wine from a wassail bowl, and the traditional toast, "To good health," is exchanged.

Invite the guests to meet at your home, and have a pre-arranged route to follow. Pass out song sheets to everyone, and caution your guests to dress warmly. If the weather is particularly cold, as most December evenings in Rochester are, you will not want to make the group's caroling time too long. You may prefer to have the guests meet at a nursing home, where the caroling can be done for the entertainment of the patients.

Upon returning to your home, merely heat the already made Hot Spiced Wassail and pour into the punch bowl. A nice accompaniment to the hot drink would be a large chunk of Graddost cheese served with crackers, along with a few hot stacks. For many yearly carolers, this is the traditional occasion to break out the fruitcake, made weeks ahead and wrapped in a brandy-soaked cheesecloth.

For a large caroling group, you may want to double the recipe for the Hot Spiced Wassail, as it is not unusual for holiday singers in good voice to want to continue the festivities back at the house, where the singing may go on into late evening.

TASTY YULE TREAT

The following recipe for oyster stew is from *The Complete Book of Entertaining From the Emily Post Institute* written by Elizabeth Post and Anthony Staffieri (Harper and Row).

OYSTER STEW

- 1 stick butter or margarine
- 3 cups oysters
- 2 cups milk
- 4 cups medium cream
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Cayenne pepper and paprika

Melt butter and sauté the oysters until the edges curl, about three minutes. Add the milk and cream and bring to a boil. Season with salt, pepper and cayenne and sprinkle with paprika. Makes 16 small servings.

HOT SPICED WASSAIL

- 6 inches stick cinnamon
- 16 whole cloves
- 1 tsp. whole allspice
- 3 medium-sized oranges whole cloves
- 6 c. apple juice or cider
- 2 c. cranberry juice cocktail
- 1/4 c. sugar
- 1 tsp. aromatic bitters
- 1 c. rum



Break cinnamon sticks in pieces and tie in a cheesecloth bag with 16 cloves and whole allspice. Stud the oranges with the whole cloves. In saucepan combine apple juice, cranberry juice cocktail, sugar and aromatic bitters. Add bag of spices and oranges and simmer, covered, 10 minutes. Stir in rum and heat through. Remove spices and oranges. Pour into warm serving bowl and float oranges on top. Makes 9 cups.

HAM TRIANGLES

- 1/4 lb. ham, minced
- 4 oz. Gruyere or Swiss cheese, shredded
- 1/2 c. chutney, chopped
- 1 T. dry mustard
- 1/2 lb. phyllo dough (strudel leaves)
- 1/2 c. unsalted butter, melted

Combine ham with cheese, chutney and mustard; set aside.

Cut phyllo dough lengthwise into 2"-wide strips. (When working with phyllo, keep it covered with damp towel to prevent its drying out.)

Brush one strip phyllo lightly with butter.

Place about a teaspoonful of filling at end of strip.

Fold corner of strip diagonally over filling so that short end meets long edge of strip, forming a right-angle triangle.

Continue folding over at right angles until you reach end of strip.

Place triangle, seam-side down, on jellyroll pan; brush with butter.

Repeat, using remaining filling and dough. Do not crowd pan. (Can be made ahead to this point. Wrap well and freeze.)

Preheat oven to 425° F.

Bake 5-10 minutes until golden.

Serve hot.

Makes 5 dozen.

To bake frozen: Bake in preheated 425° F. oven 10-15 minutes.

• Delicious desserts—dramatic and daring! First, there's candlelight. Then there's a dessert buffet so special it'll be well worth waiting for.

PLAN IN ADVANCE FOR CHRISTMAS ENTERTAINING

Whether you're giving a sit down dinner for 12 or an open house for 50, plan ahead. As soon as you decide on the date, sit down with paper and pencil, and write out the guest list.

Then, decide how much money you can afford to spend. The total cost should include not only the food and drinks but also any supplies you might need, such as paper plates, and cups and glasses for wine, soda and coffee.

Decide what food you want to serve and the approximate cost per head. If the price goes over your budget, either cut the guest list or compromise with a different menu.

You should send out the invitations about three weeks in advance. After you have an idea of how many you can expect, buy the non-perishable items such as liquor.

Set yourself a daily schedule of what you will prepare when. Many foods can be made in advance and frozen.

It's also important to decide whether you will need to hire help for the occasion. If you have willing friends or relatives, you may be able to persuade them to take on some of the tasks.

If this is the case, do remember to thank them with an extra-special Christmas present. Either way be sure to write down exactly what tasks you will need them to perform.

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Experts advise on elegant entertaining

©Dina Merrill says, "In planning a party, always invite some guests who haven't met all the others. It helps assure an interesting conversation mix."

Celeste Holm recommends, "Create an elegant holiday luncheon around a dish that's unpredictable—like an Indian egg curry."

A touch of elegance

House Beautiful decorating editor Mary Emmerling advises, "Placecards are elegant. Think of new and fun ways to let your guests know where you want them to sit, like a tagged gift or flower at each place setting."

These are just a few of the lively entertaining ideas in a new 16-page booklet called "Bringing New Elegance to the '80s." It's a free publication, published as a consumer service by the U.S. offices of Finlandia Vodka, and it's a perfect hostess-helper for the holiday season.

Keep guests in mind

For instance, Chip Tolbert, fashion director of the Men's Fashion Association, warns, "Never serve drippy hors d'oeuvres. They're disastrous to both clothes and carpets. And have enough hangers—guests don't appreciate having their coats heaped on a bed."

He also reminds, "Remember the cocktail napkins, to prevent moisture from dripping on guests' clothes."

However, an eye-catching

idea for an elegant holiday occasion is serving drinks from a block of ice. Make an ice mold by putting a bottle of Finlandia Vodka in a half-gallon milk carton.

Fill with water and freeze until solid—the vodka won't freeze. Remove the carton by running lukewarm water around the outside. Then, line a tray with napkins, place the vodka ice block on top and serve—as they do in reindeer country!

Tabletop beauty

For elegance in table settings, Mary Emmerling uses one big wine glass no matter what she's serving, and columnist Harriet Van Horne warns, "No dinner served under the hot-white glare of a 1,000 watt chandelier can possibly be elegant. Get out those candles!"

Her favorite dinner for six (which she says is the ideal number) is a serve-yourself Beef Stroganoff, into which she stirs a unique finishing touch, three tablespoons of cultured sour cream and a splash of vodka.

Her elegant dinner ideas, along with "Dina Merrill's Elegant Brunch," "Celeste Holm's Elegant Lunch," and other entertaining ideas by seven experts, are in the pointer-packed booklet.

Send for booklet

For a complimentary copy, just send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Finlandia Elegance, P.O. Box 1058, FDR Station, New York, NY 10022.

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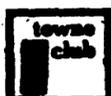
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