

HOSPITALITY IDEAS

FOR COOKING

My mom has always been great at showing hospitality to groups small or large, family, friends, or strangers. While she can cook and bake with the best of them, her simple standby for company is still one of my favorites. She'd cook brownie batter in a muffin tin and gently press them down when they came out so they'd have a little dip in the center. They would easily pop out of the tin (without muffin liners). When served (in a small bowl), she'd top them with a scoop of vanilla ice cream and let everyone customize their own brownie sundae.

Bethany

Being Japanese, we have a couple favorite meals that are fun to share. The first is a hand-roll sushi meal. If you can find a Japanese Market around that has fresh sushi grade fish, you can cook some Japanese rice, add a packet of "sushi-no-ko" which gives it that wonderful sushi rice (vinegar) flavor (not necessary though), get some dry seaweed "nori", and have everyone make their own handrolls. This can be done with cucumbers, avocado, crabmeat mixed with mayo for California rolls, or if you don't like sushi, anything else creative you might come up with and enjoy in a handroll.

Our second favorite is "Yakiniku" We have a tabletop burner so we get thinly sliced beef, shitake mushrooms, bok choy cabbage, tofu, bean sprouts, (feel free to add what you like) and cook it all on the table-top burner. You can pick up a "yakiniku" marinade or Korean BBQ sauce at the Japanese Market or sometimes even at your local grocery. The meat comes out delicious just marinated in soy sauce with grated ginger (ginger root can be kept in the freezer and grated frozen) and the veggies can be given a drizzle of soy while cooking. The fun of it is that everyone can get in on the cooking since it's done at the table in front of everyone and makes for a festive meal. Best served with plain or fried rice and miso soup.

Naomi

Root beer floats are easy and you can have that on hand. Requires no prep. If we had a backyard that was conducive to a fire pit it would be great to have over families and make s'mores! Plus--the mess is outside!

Margaret

With all the HGTV and Food Network shows, I think some of us feel pressure when showing hospitality. I know that when I am a guest, I feel loved when the hostess has taken

the care to make me/us feel special. That doesn't necessarily mean slaving all day for a Paula Deen spread.

I have found that Trader Joe's has wonderful cheats for quick appetizers and desserts. They have fresh pizza dough that can be quickly rolled out, spread with their pesto in a jar, add freshly chopped tomatoes and some grated parmesan (already grated in a tub) and you have a beautiful summer bruschetta. Serve with cloth napkins and flavored seltzer waters or sparkling TJ lemonade and it takes less than 5 minutes to prepare.

I bought a round cutting board at a discount store and can quickly throw together a cheese board with 2 types of cheeses, 2 types of crackers and some grapes (use 2 colors) and maybe some strawberries. It feels elegant, but is not work at all.

Their tarts and flourless chocolate cakes can be set on a stand. Add fresh berries. Done. One last elegant cheat is the frozen raspberry and brie in pastry. About \$6 and can stay in the freezer 'til needed. You can always garnish with some mint or basil from the garden. Or you can gather a few blooms in a tiny jar and stick in the center of your platter.

The idea is to keep things handy to pull out, use the semi-homemade line of thought and serve your guest without stressing (or not inviting because of the intimidation).

Heather

I like to plan ahead for hospitality, but last year I had a good friend with a husband in Iraq who needed more "as needed" fellowship. My fall back meal for us and five kids was pancakes; they are fast, good for any meal, relatively cheap and everybody likes them. Picky eaters just ate them with butter syrup while my friend and I would dress them up a bit with fresh fruit and cream.

Rebecca

The biggest hospitality helper for me is a crockpot. I can get dinner on early in the day so I am not running frantic just before they come; I have time before dinner for the inevitable last minute things that come up; and there is more wiggle room for serving -- if guests run late or other things take time, you can usually let the crockpot stay on low keeping dinner warm for a little longer. (Incidentally, I also like to use the crockpot for taking meals to someone who is sick or just home from the hospital. I can make enough for their dinner and ours and keep ours warming on low while I run theirs over to them).

Barbara

Our family serves overseas in Central Asia. One big way to show hospitality here is to invite your neighbors for tea or be ready to "tea" with guests who show up unexpectedly. (Which happens a lot!) I have grown to love this time with others. I keep my cabinet stocked with a

variety of teas, candies, crackers, nuts, fruit, and cookies. In America, we usually only had guests for dinner or Sunday lunch. Afternoon and morning teas are a new cultural norm we have learned here. I have learned to use the in between times to show hospitality. Sometimes we even have guests over for breakfast now. These in between moments are especially useful for ministering to moms.

Gail

I bought individual pizza doughs (from Trader Joe's in my area), cut them in fourths to make them personal size. I set up topping stations: americano, bbq chicken, mexican, margherita, white pizza, etc. Let guests top their own. You can bake four at a time. This way there is very little cooking to be done until guests arrive and everyone gets what they like - very easy!

Meg

When I make a meal for my family (husband and two sons, two and under) I try to always have enough in case a last minute guest is invited for dinner. If no one is invited then the extra food becomes our lunch for the next day (or two!). And while it happens more often that no one unexpected is around for dinner, we have had several opportunities to minister to single young men from church or my husbands work with only seconds notice to myself and having the extra food on hand makes it extremely un-stressful for me.

Jessica

*Breakfast for dinner!

*I like to make chocolate chip cookie dough and freeze in little balls so I can make some when people pop in!

Jackie

I've found that its fun to have some part of the meal that can be made together. One thing my husband and I have enjoyed is BBQ pizza. The ladies enjoy getting the toppings assembled in the kitchen (it gives everyone something to do which can ease some nervousness when getting to know each other) and the men always enjoy tending to the fire outside. Just put some cornmeal on a piece of foil, and then stick the pizza dough onto the foil, grill for about 10 minutes, stick the toppings on, and grill till its melty and cooked! Everyone enjoys helping and working on a project together, and it gives everyone a part to play if they want! Dough can be made from scratch or picked up at the grocery store, and toppings can be simple, whatever's in the fridge.

Sara

Considering the increase in food allergies, it is wise to always ask new guests if they have food allergies or intolerances. If they do have allergies, give them the option to either give you directions on cooking for them or to bring some/all of their own food.

If they do let you to cook for them, they're essentially entrusting you with their health -- follow any instructions very carefully and don't be embarrassed to ask for clarification.

If they choose to bring their own food, don't take it personally. Sometimes it's easier for people with food allergies to bring their own food along for the fellowship than to try to remember every detail they would need to explain to you! Other times, a guest just doesn't want to burden you with strange cooking requirements.

Hospitality is about blessing the guests, and that blessing sometimes looks a little unconventional in the arena of food allergies!

Kristine

ON A TIGHT BUDGET

If you have large numbers of people over frequently, it can get expensive to keep buying paper/plastic plates. You can shop around at garage sales or look for really good sales on regular plates--as long as you have a place to store them. I was able to buy 30 matching china plates for \$3--10 cents a plate! But it doesn't even matter if they don't match. It's fun to have variety too!

Holly

We're on a tight budget so some of the ways we've found to be hospitable with lack of funds are:

Throw potatoes in the oven before church and have a baked potato lunch with folks after church at our house. Very cheap!

Invite for snacks, dessert and games, lunch or brunch if you can't afford to serve dinner.

Ask everyone to bring a dish to share and invite a few families over.

Invite friends over for watermelon and lemonade or brownies and hot cocoa instead of a meal.

Serve box mac n' cheese to the little kids since they tend to just waste food when they are with their friends anyhow!

Lindsey

Love to serve meals to guests, but because we are on an extremely tight budget, I have begun inviting people over for dessert. This way, I can focus on preparing a special, from-scratch dessert (usually a pie or a cake), and it costs far less than a meal. I invite guests to come either in the afternoon, after lunch time, or around 7:00 pm. Another plus is that there is much less fuss with food and more time to spend with guests!

Jeanna

As a mom of a 4 year old, most of my entertaining involves hosting another family with young kids. It can be really expensive to feed 2 complete families! To cut costs, I skimp on the kids table.

I plan on serving a "real" dinner plate to everyone 10 and up--while the younger kids are served hot dogs or peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. It usually works out since kids that young are picky eaters to begin with!

Jaci

One other thing that's really cheap and easy and makes things special for guests is making "fancy water." Fill up a pitcher of water in advance, and put some fancies in it! Keep it nice and cold till guests arrive. Yummy combinations: lemon and cucumber slices, mint sprigs and lime slices, apple and orange slices, berries.

Sara

We are on a very tight budget but still enjoy having friends over. Our favorite way we love to show hospitality is to include various church families in our "Sunday Movie Night". Our 3 1/2 year and 1 1/2 year old take turns picking out their favorite children's movie to watch after church on Sunday nights. We eat quesadillas (flour tortillas and cheese), strawberries, and homemade ice cream sitting in front of the tv, eating off tv trays. The boys enjoy the chance to eat while watching a movie and the unique experience of eating somewhere other than the family table. We invite church families over who have children and let the kids have run of the tv room. The adults stay in the kitchen and catch up while the kids have fun in the other room. This cheap and fun get together is a great way for us to stay connected and build stronger relationships with our church friends and provide a less-stressful avenue for preparing for the usual busy week. It is also a chance for us to meet, in an informal setting, with the families we have in our shepherding group and talk about what needs they have. We have been richly blessed by opening up our family nights and including other families in our crazy house of fun.

Mia

We're young and on a tight budget, but we try to have folks over for dinner once or twice a week. Some of the things we do to "stretch" the food budget:

*Cook budget-friendly meals like chili and soups. I'll use meat to flavor it (like ground beef in red chili or a chicken breast or two in white chili), but then add more beans/veggies to add bulk.

*We usually serve heartier soups and chilis over pasta or rice, which means there is more to go around. I buy rice in large bags from Costco, and pasta from Trader Joe's where it is very inexpensive.

*I also buy nice cheeses (like Parmesan) from Costco. Fresh parmesan adds to any dish!

*I have a bread machine and try to use it regularly. I can bake foccacia bread for less than it costs in stores - same for French and Italian loaves.

*We belong to a CSA so we get very high quality vegetables for a great deal. I will usually incorporate these fresh, delicious veggies as side-dishes.

*For desserts we usually have decaf coffee (Trader Joe's or Costco) that we grind that night. We also have tea and hot chocolate for the non-coffee drinkers. I try to keep biscotti (home-made or store bought) on hand for an instant dessert. Also, I love baking cakes and many pound and bundt cakes can be cut into sections and frozen, ready to be defrosted for a special dessert.

Kristin

Later in my marriage, God really brought home the idea that, "You do the best you can, with what you have, for the Glory of God". I may not have the biggest dining room but I can serve Him and others for His glory and use exactly what He has blessed me with to do so. We have a small group Bible study for teenage girls in our home on Sundays. Because the house is generally clean, we use this time to host several families of differing ages that might not normally choose to be together. This has proven to be a blessed time. I try to keep the menu simple with things that can be prepared the night before. We even set the table on Saturday night. Pretty plastic table cloths and fancy paper plates make clean up a breeze. Small vases of daisies and candles help to make common tables lovely. We have a very small (I mean really small) kitchen. So, after the food is all warmed, I cover the older stovetop with a breakfast tray and put the ice bucket, clear plastic cups, and drink options on top. This helps me serve drinks and helps hide an unsightly area. At first, my heart was not really into having these times. However, our whole family has been blessed by being purposeful to be hospitable.

Kelley

WITH KIDS

With 3 kids 4 and under, it is sometimes exhausting to find the energy to entertain. I have found that it is much easier to prepare for it for a week instead of on the day before. If I clean the house one room at a time in the week leading up to Sunday, then on Saturday I can do final touches and be less stressed on Sunday. I also try to prepare the menu well in advance, shop ahead of time, and plan simple meals. By taking little steps every day toward making my home a haven, I am better prepared for company on the weekend.

Lindsey

It's a big help to guests with babies to remove all the breakables from the living room. I like to keep a small basket of my daughter's old baby toys stored in the closet, so when my friends with little crawlers come over, we have a few toys to keep them interested.

Jaci

I've found that I have to be intentional about scheduling time for hospitality. One way I do this is by hosting a regularly scheduled monthly play date at my home. I invited 8 other moms who have children the same age as my own. The kids love to play together and it is a great time of refreshment for the adults. Over the past year or so since we started, great relationships have been born. Some of these women are believers and some are not. It is so wonderful to see them care for one another as new babies are born and life events happen. It's my hope that my home would be a place where God's grace is found...and it wouldn't happen if I didn't first carve out the time in our schedule and then take the initiation to invite!

Darath

A godly older woman once told me how she incorporated her children into her practices of hospitality. As she got ready for guests to arrive, her little ones would be working hard alongside her in the kitchen doing their own project: 1) making place cards w/ a Bible verse on it (which the mother always would pray for the guests w/ the children before they arrived), 2) drawing pictures for the ones that would be coming, and 3) practicing a song or play for the guests. The creative juices could keep flowing with more ideas! But, the whole practice of anticipating guests and having her children do the same - with tangible things to show their guests they cared for them and that they have been waiting for them to come is one of the best ways, I believe, to teach a child to love and consider others, and to begin early on training them towards valuing God's call for all of us to practice hospitality.

Millie

My kids are little, and for a while it felt like hospitality was impossible. Until my dear husband suggested we feed the kids before the guests arrive. I give them cereal or something else easy while I'm making the real dinner. This keeps them occupied and out from under my feet, and also helps them be more cheerful since they're used to eating around 5pm, and most guests come around 6pm. When the guests arrive, we have the kids join us for the first 10 minutes of dinner, and they can munch on something if they want, but no pressure. And of course they always come back for dessert. But for the majority of the meal they can play quietly or watch a movie. This frees me to have conversation and serve our guests with reduced distraction/discipline issues.

Bethany

Some of us young mums are unsurprisingly finding evening meals a bit of a handful on top of our small children! How do you manage to invite people in to your home when you are having difficulty just getting dinner on for your own lot! So we have begun 'Tebb's Tea' or 'Gardner's Grub' or 'Dante's Dinner!' (anyone's surname followed by something related to dinner)!

A few of us have decided to regularly take turns hosting another family around in the week to just join in with the regular family meal. This means that the mums and kids have company during that horribly long 4-6pm slot before the dads get home and one mum gets an evening off cooking each week! The dads love it too as they just come straight from work to the family's house that is hosting and our greeted by happy wives and kids and a warm meal! The best part is...its part of an unspoken agreement that we are free to just 'eat and run'. We all have babies to bath and put to bed so as soon as the food is gone, so are the guests!

Abbey

Around Valentines Day I'll invite my friends with kids over. I put out all my kids toys and provide chips and drinks. Everyone brings a sandwich and a "Valentine"/candy of some sort to share. You can do a craft with the older ones to make bags for collecting the candy or have some ahead of time.

Around Christmas it is hard to get together but something fun to do after ward (mid-January) is have a toy-share party. The kids all bring a new toy that they received to share with one another. Again, put all the toys out and provide a few munchies and drinks for everyone.

Erin

INVITATIONS AND CONVERSATION

I have felt the conviction to practice hospitality for several years but the fear of man has kept me away from obeying the Lord's command. I talked to my mom about it in the spring. She lives just seven miles from me...what a blessing that is. Anyway, as we talked about this command we decided that this summer we would work on practicing hospitality together. Every other week, on Sunday, we would each invite a family from our church over for Sunday lunch. One Sunday would be at her house and one would be at mine. That way we were getting to know four new (or new to us) families a month but only having it at our house once a month. On the Sunday that we hosted we were responsible for the main dish and veggie. My mom always made the bread, the best rosemary bread you have ever tasted. I would include the recipe but I don't know it :) The non-host would bring dessert and another side dish. If one of the families offered to bring something then we would suggest a side dish or dessert. It has been fun and has taken some of the fear away. I was thinking we would only do it during the summer but we have decided to continue on into the fall. Sorry this is so long but I didn't know how to make the explanation shorter.

Kathie

We regularly sit down and make purposeful lists of folks we want over. We have limited space (small table that seats four!) so typically we will have another couple over, two same-sex singles, or a single person we're trying to get to know. We usually have lists for new members at our church that we want to welcome, college students, other friends, or folks either me or my husband is discipling. We try to make a mix between building our current relationships (easier) or inviting new people into our home (harder).

Another thing that has been a big blessing to us: we go to church in the middle of DC, and my husband was an intern last fall - they supplied us housing right down the street. During this time something that we liked to do was prepare a meal before church on Sunday (a crock-pot dish, or make a simple soup the night before and make some bread in the machine before service starts) and then my husband, who stood at one of the doors after service, would invite first or second time guests over to our place for lunch. Folks were usually shocked to get invited over their first time, and one of my most happy hospitality moments came out of this. A grad student we invited over was very wary of getting too involved or joining a church based on past bad experiences - over lunch my husband was able to talk through biblically what church membership should look like. They had a long, fruitful conversation. A few months later he joined our church and is a faithful member.

Kristin

My husband and I try to talk beforehand about what we're going to ask our guests about. That way when I'm running around in the kitchen, or in and out of the room, he's able to take on the "conversation mover" role. Its nice to discuss beforehand so we're both equipped with things we'd like to ask.

Sara

We often have couples over. At some point - to be sure to get beyond "surface" talk, my husband will go around and ask them to share: 1) One Character quality you admire in your spouse; 2) One way they hope to improve as a spouse in the future. This ALWAYS proves to be very meaningful for the couples, and spurs great conversation. People talk about it for years to come.

Jan

Our favorite thing to do is ask each guest to bring a passage from a favorite book or a poem to share. We do readings after the meal. It's entertaining, and the passages are good conversation starters.

Diane

MULTIPLE IDEAS

I'm a single mom and I really enjoy being able to be hospitable. My son is 5 and loves to cook, so we often make a day of preparing. I choose a recipe that needs to bake for a long time and we make it together in the early afternoon, then straighten up while we race the meal in the oven (this also works well with a dessert made in the morning). This gives him a sense of ownership over the serving and heightens his anticipation of the evening. It also allows time for us to discuss appropriate behavior as we make preparations--we both prepare our hearts for the time with others, including prayers for godly responses to our guests and those in authority.

There are three specific groups of people I try to invite over, and I prepare for each differently:

1) If I invite a family with children over, I ask them to come 45 minutes to an hour before the meal. This gives the kids time to play, and me time to discuss seating and special needs for each of the children with the other mom. I usually make a casserole or enchiladas for this--something that frees me to serve as a hostess instead of a director tied to the stove.

2) If I invite a childless couple or singles over, I usually serve dinner a little later than normal. I specifically ask the guy (usually beforehand) if he would be willing to play with my son at

airhockey or catch or some such thing before the meal--my son loves this, and is then usually more willing to engage in the conversation appropriately at dinner. I bathe my son before they arrive and he eats in his PJs. After dinner, he goes to bed so that Mama can have "adult time" with her friends, and while I am putting him to bed, I ask my guests to clean up the dishes or choose a game or movie (this may sound rude, but it enables us to have fellowship instead of me being on sink-duty all night).

3) If I invite the children of different families over, I do it in the afternoon or for an early dinner so their parents can have a date without getting a sitter. The kids play together, and if it's age-appropriate, I have a cooking activity for the kids to all participate in--either a meal or a dessert for their family that they can take home with them. Bisquick Impossible pies are perfect for dinners and brownies for desserts, as they are simple and bake unattended, and we can get back to playing! I feed them something simple, like hot dogs or pasta, that can be ready in a few minutes. This really gives my son a chance to practice drawing others out and preferring them instead of being the "little entertainer" in a room full of accommodating adults.

Dorah

*Challenge yourself to invite one different person or couple over per month and -- here is the key -- make the same thing! We make either tacos or homemade pizza -- inexpensive and most of the ingredients are things I have on hand or in the freezer (like frozen chopped onions and bell peppers, and frozen ground meat). Doing the same meal over and over again takes the stress out of meal-making.

*When you ask if your guests have food allergies, write it down so that you will have that information for the next time you invite them over.

*Pray for the people coming over.

*Have a "door's always open" mentality. Pick a few key rooms to always have in a "semi-clean" state in case someone just happens to drop by. For me, that means the living room, kitchen, and guest bathroom are presentable. It also makes spontaneously inviting others over more likely to happen.

*Listen to sermons or conference messages on hospitality as you prepare for a guest's arrival.

*Treat your own family with utmost love -- that is a big priority. If I'm being extra gracious to my guests, but seconds before they came through the door I was being unkind toward my husband, then something is fundamentally wrong with how I'm doing hospitality.

*Always bring the conversation toward spiritual things in some way.

*Have people over for snacks or dessert. Have a "Popcorn and Prayer" meeting. Play board games and serve warm brownies and milk.

*Make sure your guest list is varied. Ask, "Am I only inviting over other believers?"

*Remember, your house is not your own. God ultimately owns it. We are stewards of our houses. Ask, "Lord, who do you want me to open up my home to?"

Kristen

*I went through the church directory and made a list of people I want to invite and have paired up couples with things in common...2 couples expecting their first baby, 2 couples who are new to the church, etc.

*I'm single and live alone, so at least once a week when I cook I prepare enough for about 6, take out my portion and then either parcel out servings for a few other single friends, or share the rest with a family in the church.

*I try to always keep the ingredients for a few simple meals and desserts handy so I can whip something up quickly.

Bethany

*Take advantage of summer months and have larger families over when you can be outside.

*For my young ones (3 & 5), put out a blanket or tablecloth on the floor where they can "picnic" with other young guests while adults sit around the table. This makes it fun for the kids while the adults can talk a little bit more and get to know each other.

*Great little 5 minute 'get-to-know-you' game is Whoonu by Cranium. Players hold cards with random words on them (hiking, comics, roller coasters, french fries) and picks what they think the other persons favorite is. Then the other person puts in order what their favorite things are, giving everyone the opportunity to learn their likes/dislikes. Keep this noted in your head and write it down when they leave so you have a good idea of how to minister to them with their favorite or least favorite foodss, activities, and interests. We also play a round of "LEAST favorite" which is always funny.

*Don't set aside family devotions just b/c you have guests over. Guests LOVE to be a part of it. The lesson may be geared toward your 3 year old but it is a true blessing for them to see and hear little children learning about Jesus. Sing a song the children know. This is also makes your guests feel like part of the family.

*If there are lots of children or families are traveling long distances to church, plan to meet up or go to a park one Sunday after church for a meal together.

*If visiting missionaries are staying with you, think through what their needs might be - obviously food, what about gas money? what about a quiet date night out?

*Watch out for college students who don't have any family around. Invite them into your home.

*I don't want to copy down ideas but two books that are filled with recipes and practical ideas: Hospitality Commands and We Didn't Know They Were Angels

Katherine

MISCELLANEOUS

One day, I'd love to create a "hospitality journal" where each guest signs a guestbook chronicling their visit, we take a photo of the family and paste it on their page, and jot down what we serve for dinner/dessert, games we played, prayer requests, etc.

Kristie

When I take my tablecloth out of the linen drawer it has terrible creases at the folds. Instead of ironing it, I wipe the table with a wet cloth, leaving it damp, and place the table cloth on it. I am always pleased with the results of a smooth look without the time consuming, last minute ironing.

Lucy
