Tips for Hosting a Successful Holiday Cooking School
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Establish Committee
• Establish committee early (at least six months before event) and meet as many times as needed to plan and host a successful cooking school.
• Try to get at least one representative from each club to serve on the committee.
• Committee determines the date, time, theme, and location of the cooking school(s).
• Plan recipes, decorations, paper plates, etc., around the selected theme.
• Appoint a secretary to take detailed notes on decisions made at the meetings.
• Begin each committee meeting by reviewing the minutes of the prior meeting and following up on individual assignments and important items of business.
• Hold committee meetings at various times since all members can’t meet at the same time every meeting. This allows more involvement from more members.

Selecting Recipes & Educational Information
• Select simple recipes that have few and common ingredients and are inexpensive to prepare.
• Choose a variety of recipes that include appetizers, beverages, soups, meat and main dish, vegetables, etc.
• Begin searching for recipes at least six months before event in a variety of magazines, cookbooks, internet, etc.
• It is important to choose recipes that are unique and/or different and be creative in garnishing the featured food items.
• Provide information on adapting recipes to encourage healthy eating habits.
• Provide educational information on food safety, entertaining for the holidays, table settings, adapting recipes, etc.
• Provide the nutritional analysis for each recipe.
• Mark “healthy” recipes that are lower in fat, sugar, sodium, cholesterol, etc., with an asterisk.
• Include “heart-healthy” recipes that are suitable for people with diabetes and other health-related problems/concerns, as well as featuring two or three in the actual demonstration.
• Feature a different artificial sweetener each year.
• Choose a selected number of recipes from the Pride of Kentucky cookbook to feature during the demonstration to promote the book and highlight Kentucky grown foods.

Test Recipes
• Test all recipes to be featured in the demonstration and make necessary changes.
• Plan some committee/tasting sessions at 12 noon and/or evening hours.
• Ask for volunteers of committee members, as well as other homemakers to make recipes and bring to the committee meetings on the designated testing times.
• Avoid testing too many items at one time. It works best to select two categories to be tested at each tasting session. For example, have two to three fudge recipes and snack mix recipes at one tasting session instead of several recipes in different categories.

• Prepare a written evaluation that includes: name of recipe, source of recipe, cost to make, were ingredients easily found?, time required to prepare recipe, flavor of recipe, is the finished product attractive?, appropriate garnishes, ease of preparation, changes made to recipe, etc. Keep one copy of the evaluation tool on file for each recipe tested for future reference.

**Advertise and Publicity**

• Advertise that participants will get to taste or sample recipes. Many participants will come to the event straight from work and will be hungry long before the tasting. It is helpful to include the following sentence on the promotional flyer: **Please eat before coming to the program since it will be two hours or longer before samples will be served.**

• Make sure the event gets enough media coverage, especially for the first time offering a cooking school.

• Contact newspaper(s) ahead of time to arrange for a representative from the paper to cover the story two weeks before tickets go on sale and also during the cooking school. A follow-up story after the event is really nice. Make sure to include photographs and list of sponsors of the event.

**Be Prepared!**

• Have plenty of volunteers to help out with last minute assignments since many jobs can’t be completed until 2 to 3 days before the school.

• Prepare and freeze as many food items as possible that will be sampled by the participants. Many recipes can be frozen for two or more weeks before the date needed. Also, make all featured food items to be shown the evening of the demonstration ahead of time and freeze or refrigerate.

• Buy ingredients needed for the demonstration and tasting during store specials. This works well if freezer space is available and really cuts down on the costs involved.

• Buy paper plates, cups, napkins, etc., one year in advance when on clearance for the next year’s school. This is especially helpful because many stores don’t even have their seasonal paper goods in stock during the time you need them.

• Always plan for more food and paper items than what you think you will need. It is wise to plan for at least 30-40 extra. You will also need enough cups for two drinks if you offer coffee/hot drink when participants are arriving before the demonstration and then a cold drink during the tasting.

• Stress the importance of several or as many as possible staying after the event to help with cleanup.
Prepare the Demonstrators

- Meet with the demonstrators as many times as needed to clarify their questions and educate them on “How to Give a Demonstration”.
- Remove all jewelry and pull back long hair away from the food.
- Avoid licking fingers and spoons, touching face and hair, etc., while demonstrating.
- Avoid making loud noises with mixer, metal utensils, etc., when possible.
- Wear food service grade plastic and/or rubber gloves when handling food.
- Explain spices, utensils, cake pans, or anything participants might not be familiar with. It is also fun to share hints and tips on each recipe being demonstrated.
- Use clear glass bowls and measuring cups when possible.
- Practice using the demonstration table and mirror several times before the event.
- Have several people sit at various locations within the room to see if the majority of the participants will be able to see the demonstration from the mirror.
- It is especially nice to project the demonstration on the wall by using an LCD projector and camcorder.

Calculate Amount of Food Needed for Tasting

- Decide on the size of pan to be used when preparing the food and size of samples to be served.
- Calculate, calculate and re-calculate the amount of food needed for tasting. It is better to have leftover food than not have enough to serve everyone.

Preparing the Trays

- Assign each recipe being demonstrated a number and label ingredients accordingly. For example, put #1 on all ingredients that go with the recipe that is #1.
- Cut, measure, and store ingredients in small containers for each recipe being demonstrated.
- Place each recipe being demonstrated on the tray with the ingredients. May also include notes of items to cover while demonstrating recipe.

Preparing the Goody Bags

- Stuff goody bags one week before event and transfer to location the school is to be held.
- Use strong, durable bags that have a fold-out bottom and handles.
- Pass out bags at the end of the program as participants turn in their completed evaluation form.

Serving the Food Samples

- Plan room setup, serving tables and flow of the traffic to get participants through the line as quickly as possible. It is very important to have two serving tables and lines conveniently located within the serving area when feeding 100 or more persons.
- Prepare multiple trays of the same item on clear glass or plastic trays with doilies.
• Have at least four persons assigned to each serving table to serve the food on the plates and at least two persons per serving table to keep tables supplied with food.
• Display stand-up cards for each food item being served with the title of recipe.

General Information
• Pass out a sheet of local and national sponsors that gives all contributors credit for their sponsorship.
• Recognize committee members present at the cooking school by asking them to stand and also list them on the sponsor sheet.
• Have a designated person to take plenty of pictures of the event. It is also helpful to take pictures of decorations, table setup, demonstration table, and arrangement of room, serving tables, etc., for future reference.
• Make sure the cooking school starts on time and ends within two hours.
• Give a warm welcome by introducing yourself, program theme and sponsors.
• Have a 10-minute intermission in the middle of the program.
• It is nice to serve a warm drink and snack mix or appetizer to participants as they arrive at the program.
• It may be necessary to appoint volunteers to help park vehicles before the event.
• Participants should be greeted by volunteer hostesses and receive a warm welcome to the program.
• Holiday or soft music is nice to play and creates an atmosphere for the occasion.
• Have extra names of volunteers on a back-up list to fill in case of last minute cancellations of volunteers. You should expect to have two to three cancellations of volunteers when dealing with a large number of volunteers.
• Make and post signs to help direct participants.

Preparing the Room/Facility
• Arrange chairs so that all participants can see the mirror on the demonstration table. Also leave appropriate walkways or aisles for easy flow of traffic. Be careful to not get chairs too close together.
• Only sell the number of tickets that you can comfortably prepare for and the number allowed in the room due to fire and safety regulations.
• May want to set up equipment to show an educational Power Point presentation during the time participants are waiting for the program to begin. This is usually the time between registration and the time for the program to begin. This is a wonderful opportunity to provide educational information to participants.

Door Prizes
• Have door prizes labeled with donor and presented in an attractive bag or gift-wrapped box.
• Decide ahead of time the method of distributing the door prizes.
• It works well to give out a few door prizes while demonstrators are changing and setting up for the next block of recipes to be demonstrated.
• Make sure all donors get recognition for contributing.

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