



taste buds

chef Larry Janes

Invite guests to dip in

Looking for an unusual idea for an upcoming holiday party? My west coast "sorcerer" just faxed me the menu from a cutting edge duo who recently threw a "dip" party.

THE NOTE began: "Having been raised in a Midwestern influenced kitchen, we deemed it only obligatory to throw a 'dip' party for our friends, many who are or have been dips in this and/or past lives."

Don't get the wrong idea that the Jones Gang are all a bunch of dips; however, after receiving this correspondence, I have come to realize that many of our family functions surround a table full of dips, namely, the standard Lipton French Onion one that cousin Sally was noted for because everyone knew she never set foot in a kitchen. Rosie's ground bologna dip that she inherited from momma and continues to make with a hand-cranked, table-clamped meat grinder and Aunt Phyllis' standard Hot Artichoke dip with Triscuits.

FREQUENTLY, THERE was a bubbling pot of cheese fondue made in someone's old crockpot, a heavy enameled cast-iron ramekin of Velveta Mexicali, and the precursor to a ranch dip, also known as Aunt Aurelia's "Green Goddess Gunk."

If my memory serves me correctly, it was right after culinary arts school that I stunned the family with a Guacamole that was actually greener than the "Green Goddess Gunk."

Momma had never tasted an avocado and, having never really liked the Velveta Mexicali, turned up her nose at the chunky blend of avocado, tomato, onion, lemon juice and spices.

Fortunately, a few of the more trendy cousins recognized the flavors and opted to pass up the ground bologna for something a little more exotic.

The word got around that my homemade tortilla chips far surpassed anything that would ever "sit on a Ritz."

Pick up any nouveau food magazine and a quick glance at the recipe index on the back page will certainly highlight at least one or two dip-type recipes. With the onslaught of food processors, dips have been elevated from ground bologna sensations to new heights featuring everything from caviar to nuts.

The emergence of flavorful chile peppers from the Southwest, combined with exotic cheeses like Maytag Blue and a nutty Emmentaler have ushered in new flavors to enjoy.

But the best reasons, in my opinion, for throwing a dip party is the ease. Break out some bowls and a few plates or baskets for the crudites and other "dippers" and you have an instant success.

Not only does it keep your guests moving about the table and the room, but one recipe usually is enough for a gaggle of guests. Furthermore, with the trend toward a more healthy lifestyle, dips are the perfect food for the folks who "just want a taste." I would also be remiss in my duties if I failed to mention that many dips can be made very low-calorie and "heart-healthy" using plain yogurt, "light" cheese varieties and local spreads and mayonnaise.

Dips can be hot or cold, heavy or light, fruitily or spicy, fattening or healthy, smooth or chunky, expensive or cheap. They can also be some of the most best tasting foods you'll enjoy this holiday season.

For your holiday parties, I've chosen a few "old family favorites" that came from momma's files as well as some more "trendy" versions for today's healthier lifestyle. Have a happy holiday.

See recipes inside.

Nancy Bayer, who operates Gourmet Connection catering in Birmingham, shows off a plate of holiday appetizers. She recommends making easy, fix-ahead treats to serve guests.



STEVE CANTRELL/staff photographer

Plan for stress-free entertaining

By Arlene Funke
special writer

Sara Paterson of Birmingham has hosted plenty of holiday get-togethers. Her guests never see her frantically sauteing chicken breasts or chopping vegetables at dinner time.

"I don't want to be the maid," said Paterson, 46, an advertising representative. "I like to be in the living room having a good time."

Holiday entertaining — fun as it can be — also brings worries. There's never enough time. There often is guilt about the rich, fat-laden treats. And what about the cost?

Planning is the key to stress-free entertaining, experts say. (See related story).

"People get into trouble if they don't plan ahead," said Anne Minbiolo, 28, of Livonia, a registered dietitian with William Beaumont Hospital's Preventative and Nutritional Medicine Clinic in Birmingham.

Judy Murray of Redford loves to have people for dinner. Last Christmas season she prepared an elegant sit-down meal of prime rib for 24 people. "It seems homey — welcoming people to your home and eating together," Murray said.

Sandy Hidalgo of Garden City has neither time nor space for large-scale entertaining. Her style consists of filling a buffet table with spicy, Cajun-style dishes such as shrimp and rice, topped off with melt-in-your-mouth bread pudding.

"They're all good, and they're all fattening," said Hidalgo, 40, a divorced mother of four children ranging in age from 8 to 22. She's a sales representative for a photographic studio.

"They aren't super quick and easy," said Hidalgo, who developed a taste for Cajun dishes while living in Louisiana. "But most can be prepared ahead of time."

Nancy Bayer of Farmington Hills, a caterer, has a repertoire of appetizers and entrees which can be prepared in advance, frozen, then reheated

just before guests arrive.

Paterson, mother of two teenagers, prefers small dinner parties. She often prepares an entree which can be assembled ahead of time, such as chicken and mushrooms wrapped in phyllo dough and baked.

Paterson conserves energy and keeps the budget intact by choosing ingredients which are in season, and watching for sale prices. She shuns time-consuming hors d'oeuvres, but has always baked her own rolls, which guests have come to expect.

"It's better to fix a little bit less and do a good job," said Paterson, a former caterer.

Kitchen Glamor, the cookware supplies chain with stores in Redford, West Bloomfield, Rochester and Novi, recently sponsored several classes on holiday entertaining.

Nancy Bayer, who operates Gourmet Connection in Birmingham, demonstrated easy, fix-ahead recipes.

Clink glasses to toast new year

By Eleanor and Ray Heald
special writer

Holiday toasts have long been used to ring in the New Year, honor friends and relatives, and heighten the spirit of the season.

In France at the end of the 16th century, it was customary to place a piece of toast in the bottom of a wine glass. The glass was passed from hand to hand until it reached the honored person whose health was being drunk. This custom gave rise to the expression, "to drink a toast."

Superstitious people clinked glasses because they were afraid the devil would enter their bodies with the wine, so they made a noise to scare the demon away.

Today, lovers in France often intertwine forearms while sipping champagne after a toast.

To paraphrase Mark Twain, too much of anything is bad, but too much champagne is just right. It is a favorite toast of Smitty Kogan, director of the Champagne News and Information Bureau in New York.

MANY AMERICANS associate champagne with the holidays because its bubbles convey conviviality. Indeed, a New Year celebration with champagne seems appropriate. Champagne and sparkling wine is easily understood since there are only a few basic styles and types. Non-vintage champagne is a blend of wines from one harvest with reserve

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wines of varying ages obtained from previous harvests.

Vintage champagne is blended only from wines of a single year's harvest. No reserve wines are used, and the year of the crop appears on the label.

Blanc de blancs is a wine made only from white grapes. Blanc de Noirs is produced only from red grapes. Rose derives its color from the skins of red grapes. Superior (expensive) champagnes are blends of rare, costly wines and represent a producer's best effort.

There are two principal designations of dryness: Brut (very dry) and Extra-Dry (slightly sweet).

THE HOUSE of Louis Roederer offers these tips for champagne and sparkling wine service.

Serve well-chilled. The best and fastest way to bring champagne to

the proper serving temperature is to place the bottle in a bucket filled with half ice and half cold water. About 30 minutes should do it.

Use caution when opening a bottle of sparkling wine: there are 60 pounds of pressure per square inch in there! Remove the wire cage with the bottle facing away from you and your guests. Then, using a towel, slowly rotate the bottle while easing the cork from the neck, releasing it with a soft sigh. A loud pop is festive, but not desirable.

Use tulip-shaped glasses or champagne flutes, not wide shallow glasses. A tall, slender glass allows the fine bubbles to rise without disappearing quickly.

FOR PARTY planning, figure on pouring six glasses per bottle.

What to do with leftovers? An old French trick says putting a sterling silver fork into the bottle will keep it fresh and bubbly. One of the new champagne stoppers, available at gourmet or wine shops is recommended. Another option: use it in cooking and open another bottle to enjoy with your meal.

Champagne and sparkling wines are a stunning accompaniment to food, especially fish and shellfish, dishes with creamy sauces, even turkey. Don't save it for toasting.

See recipe and wine selection inside.

Party pointers

By Arlene Funke
special writer

Successful hosts and hostesses find an entertaining style that fits their lifestyles.

"If you don't, you're running ragged, and you don't have a good time because you're exhausted," said Sara Paterson of Birmingham, who favors small parties with a few couples.

IF SPACE is your big worry, take a tip from trendy folks on the East Coast. Prepare a buffet table and invite guests for staggered arrivals throughout the afternoon and evening.

In California, this style of entertaining is called "slunch."

Judy Murray of Redford Township organizes her preparations so she's able to sit down with her guests.

Some of her tips: Keep the housecleaning up. Clean over several days so you're not facing a huge set of chores just before the party begins.

Set the table ahead, if possible. Fix as many side dishes as possible in advance.

Make one element of your meal the "star" and concentrate your greatest energy there.

Never try complicated new recipes on guests.

Don't be afraid to rely on store-bought goodies to round out the menu.

Some suggestions from Paterson: Shop for groceries in advance. Take advantage of seasonal specials and sale prices.

Don't go overboard with a lot of fancy foods. Plan a few side dishes.

People who want to maintain good eating habits and keep consumption of fats to a minimum can take several tips from registered dietitians Anne Minbiolo and Tina Shepard.

MAKE YOUR own dips, substituting cottage cheese (whipped in the blender) or lowfat yogurt for the fatty cream cheese or sour cream. Pep up the dip with herbs and spices.

Instead of crackers and chips, which are very fatty, serve bagels, pita bread. Have plenty of fresh vegetables and fruit on hand.

Love egg nog? Why not consider serving hot cider or flavored coffee instead of cholesterol-laden egg nog?

Use egg whites or egg substitute (Egg Beaters) instead of the whole eggs in baking.

Instead of the typical rich pies, serve fruit cobbler with a strudel or a crustless pie with crumb topping.

If you do decide to indulge, eat a smaller portion of the desired food. To avoid being ravenous, take a small snack about an hour before the meal.

Don't make food the entire focus of the holiday. Concentrate on love, friendship and doing for others.



Domains Carneros Brut, a stellar California sparkler is the Wine Selection for the West. It has attractive lively fruit aromas with toasty, creamy, mature flavors and crisp, full body.