

How to Plan a Holiday Gathering

(StatePoint) The holiday season is the most festive time of year, from singing in the streets to gatherings with friends and family. So if you're going to be entertaining, you'll want your party to feel as cheerful as the season itself and to add some style and flair to make your party sparkle.

From the decor to the table settings to the food, a few unique twists can make guests feel welcomed, impressed and ready to party upon arrival. So set the mood accordingly.

Delight on Arrival

You can delight their senses right away with a lit fireplace or by brewing a holiday punch or

cider with cinnamon and other aromatic flavors. Also, be sure that

playing. A crooner like Bing Crosby performing holiday hits is a classic



your entranceway is decorated for the season and that there's music

choice. Just keep the volume at a conversation-friendly level.

Think Small Presentation

Instead of hosting a multi-course sit-down dinner, make life easier on yourself and more fun for your guests with a splendid spread of small plates. A small plate dinner means guests can eat whenever they arrive and mingle as they do so — it's an easy, fun way to entertain.

When it comes to parties, the visual impact of your food is as important as its taste. This is where small plates shine, as little tastes can have a

big impact with their colors, shapes and designs.

Give guests' a taste surprise with a round-the-world line up of cuisines, from traditional sliders to more exotic choices like dumplings and Mediterranean dips. For inspiration, turn to a cookbook devoted solely to miniature appetizers and desserts, such as those from author Robert Zollweg.

Aim for each dish to feature about four to six bites of food that can be eaten comfortably seated or standing, and arrange dishes on small, sleek plates, such as Libbey Just Tastings mini dinnerware collection. Both the Just Tastings collection and cookbook line are available at Bed Bath & Beyond.

For the sake of presentation, be sure your dishes present a great array of colors. Attendees will naturally end up moving around the room in

order to taste everything. Make sure to coordinate tablecloths, napkins, candleholders and centerpieces in a seasonal color scheme. You can find a colorful assortment of each at www.bedbathandbeyond.com. Don't be afraid to think creatively!

Dress it Up

You can dress up your party space with a few simple and elegant flourishes. You can make stylish centerpieces by taking clear bowls and filling them with colorful ornaments and pretty greenery. And you can fill glasses with colored stones or small candles to add a sophisticated glow to the room.

By setting a mood that is both cheerful and chic, you can make a great impression on guests and throw a party they won't soon forget.

New Food Twists This Season

(StatePoint) For many families, the best thing about the holidays isn't the lavish gifts, it's the traditions they have made together. And while old customs won't fade, families across the country are spicing up their holiday celebrations with new traditions

this year.

Here are four ideas for new food traditions you can start this holiday season:

- Serve food from other cultures: Try adding a cultural dish to your holiday feast. Danish roast

goose, Hungarian chicken paprikash, Jewish latkes, Irish oyster stew, or Grecian leg of lamb are all traditional meals that could invigorate your holiday spread. For dessert, try Italian sweet cakes or Australian Pavlova, a meringue-like treat.

- New take on an old favorite: Lots of families have traditional holiday favorites that they break out once a year. For many, that dessert is the moist, sweet cake panettone. Bauducco Panettone is a ready to eat specialty cake loaded with a variety of raisins, candied fruits

and chocolate chips. Extremely versatile, panettone can add a new twist to classic recipes. Some unique recipes include using panettone to make crostons for fresh arugula and roasted fruit salad or substituting Bauducco Panettone in a bread pudding with amaretto sauce.

"Even for breakfast, its light texture and subtle sweetness make the cake perfect to pair with coffee or hot chocolate," said Stefano Mozzi, General Manager at Bauducco Foods Inc. "It can even be used to make French toast and waffles."

For some delicious recipe ideas, visit www.bauducco.com/product/panettone.

You can find Bauducco Panettone on store shelves this holiday season at Wal-Mart, CVS, Walgreens and grocery stores, drug stores and mass market retailers nationwide.

- Plan a cookie exchange: Have everyone in your family bake one type of cookie and bring them to the festivities - one dozen cookies each for larger groups and two dozen for smaller ones. You'll have a variety of delicious cookies for dessert, while only having to bake one type yourself. This is an easy and surefire way to please your family's sweet tooth!

- Cook with the kids: The days leading up to the holidays are a great time to bond with your kids. One of the best ways to do that is to get them involved in the cooking process. Have your children pick a few recipes they can help you with. Make extra for friends, neighbors and the less fortunate and deliver them with your kids to spread some good cheer.

Try something new in the kitchen this holiday season. Sometimes the traditions you start on your own are the best of all.

Fire Safety Tips

(StatePoint) Winter holidays are a time for families and friends to get together in a festive and relaxed atmosphere.

But winter decorations can also spell fire danger. In fact, 23,600 residential fires are caused by candles annually, resulting in injury, death and millions of dollars of property damage, according to the Federal Emergency Management Association.

"Decorating safely is the key to protecting your home and loved ones during the holidays," says Chris Barnes, president of Candle Warmers Etc. "Choose products designed with safety in mind."

Every holiday reveler should take the following safety steps to prevent home fires:

- Test your smoke alarms and talk to your children about fire prevention and what to do in the event of a fire. Also, remember to tell guests about your home fire escape plan.

- Never leave a candle unattended, and keep burning candles away from items that can catch fire. Keep candles out of the reach of children and pets, and keep matches and lighters up high in a locked cabinet.

- Instead of an open flame, use candle warming plates, lamps, and lanterns. For example, the Aurora candle warmer lamp quickly heats the top of a wicked or wickless jar candle to release the candle's fragrance quickly. And a decorative candle warming lantern provides ambiance without dangerous flames.

- Choose holiday decorations that are flame resistant or flame retardant. Hang lights in their proper place — some are designed strictly for indoor or outdoor use, not both. Check strings of lights each year, replacing those that have frayed wiring and loose bulb connections. Use clips, not nails, to hang lights so the cords do not get damaged.

- Don't leave your holiday feast unattended while it is cooking.

- Before you go to sleep, make sure your fireplace fire is out completely, candles are blown out, and strings of lights and decorations are turned off.

- Have your chimneys inspected annually and cleaned if need be. This is especially important if you haven't used your fireplace in a long time. And never use wrapping paper as kindling for the fireplace. It can start a serious chimney fire.

- Discard your Christmas tree as soon as it is dry. Brittle needles indicate the tree has become a fire hazard.

More holiday fire safety tips and candle-burning alternatives can be found at www.candlewarmers.com.

Give the gift of safety this holiday by sharing these life-saving tips with friends. Creating a safe

celebratory mood at home can be as easy as pie.

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