

# Celebration



Throw a sophisticated party with an array of easy, healthy, and delicious dishes and drinks.

BY BETSY NELSON

**H**aving people over for a party can fill your house with laughter and lighten your spirit — except when you work yourself up into such a frenzy about the preparations that you can't even enjoy it.

Not to worry, says Heidi Andermack, co-owner of Chowgirls Killer Catering in Minneapolis. With a few simple planning tips, getting ready for a social gathering can be both efficient and fun.

First, says Andermack, consider the size of the

crowd you're feeding. For smaller groups, she says, you might want to dedicate more time "to fussier finger foods that need a lot of hand crafting." For larger crowds, she suggests serving simpler appetizers, such as dips and spreads, that are easy to turn out on a larger scale.

Next, think about what your guests eat. A good rule of thumb, Andermack says, is to make about half the dishes vegetarian. And when it comes to cheese, be sure to offer a variety of goat- and cow-milk cheeses. "Some people might be

lactose intolerant and you wouldn't know it," she says, adding that, in general, "variety is key."

To make the day of your party relatively stress-free, Andermack advises prepping food ahead of time. Vegetables for crudité, for example, can be cut the day before and stored in water so they stay crisp. Dips and spreads will keep in the refrigerator for a few days. "Ideally, your food will be 75 percent done on the day of the party," says Andermack. When serving, aim to make the

food look bountiful. "Use a small serving dish that's overflowing with food instead of a giant platter with only 10 skewers on it," she explains.

Most of all, don't be afraid of healthy party food. Just because something is healthy doesn't mean it tastes bad. "The trick," says Andermack, "is making food so delicious that no one knows it's healthy."

To help get your party started, we've put together a variety of healthy *and* delicious appetizer recipes.

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### Fruit and Cheese Kabobs

Get creative and experiment with different combinations of fruit and cheese.

Alternate your favorite fruits and cheese on wooden skewers.

### Kale Chips

These veggie chips are super trendy for a reason: They are addictive and endlessly versatile.

Makes 8 to 10 cups

- 1 bunch kale, washed and dried
- ½ cup chopped onion
- ½ cup seeded, chopped tomato
- 4 cloves garlic, crushed
- ½ cup chopped parsley
- ¼ cup minced chives
- ½ cup nutritional yeast
- ½ tsp. salt
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 325 degrees F. Remove the kale stems, then cut the leaves into 2-inch squares. Blend together the onion, tomato, and garlic, mix with the remaining ingredients, and toss with the kale. Place a cooling rack on top of a cookie sheet, and arrange the kale pieces in one layer on top. Bake for eight minutes, turn each kale piece over, and bake for another eight minutes until crispy. Store in an airtight container.

### Prosciutto-Wrapped Asparagus

For a sweeter taste, try wrapping prosciutto around melon or even pear slices.

Makes 12 pieces

- ¼ cup balsamic vinegar
- 12 asparagus spears, tough end trimmed off
- 4 slices prosciutto, each cut into 3 long strips
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper

Simmer the vinegar in a small saucepan until reduced by half, then chill. Blanch the asparagus for one minute, then drain and quickly transfer to a bowl of ice water. Wrap one slice of prosciutto around each dried asparagus stalk, and chill until ready to serve. Serve with a drizzle of the vinegar reduction, and salt and pepper to taste.

### Zucchini-Ricotta Pinwheels

Not a zucchini fan? Try skinny Japanese eggplant instead.

Makes 12 pinwheels

- 3 zucchini, sliced lengthwise into 4 thin slices
- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- ½ cup ricotta
- ¼ cup chopped fresh Italian parsley

Heat a grill pan or broiler. Brush zucchini with olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Broil the zucchini on each side until tender. Mix the ricotta together with the parsley and season to taste with salt and pepper. Spread 1 tablespoon of the mixture on each zucchini slice, roll up, and secure with a toothpick. Chill until ready to serve.

### Chicken-Liver Pâté

The humble chicken liver is elevated to haute cuisine when cooked and blended with a little sherry and herbs. For the vegetarian version (far right), visit [ELmag.com/partyfood](http://ELmag.com/partyfood).

Makes about 3 cups

- ¼ cup sherry or apple juice
- 1 tbs. red-wine vinegar
- ¼ cup chopped prunes
- 4 tbs. butter, divided
- 1 cup diced yellow onion
- ¼ cup minced shallot
- ½ tsp. salt
- ½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- ¾ pound organic chicken livers
- 2 hard-cooked eggs, coarsely chopped
- 1 tsp. chopped fresh thyme

Combine the sherry, vinegar, and prunes, and soak for at least an hour. Heat 2 tablespoons butter in a heavy skillet and add the onion, shallots, salt, and pepper. Sauté until caramelized and remove from the pan. Melt the remaining butter, and sauté the chicken livers until just cooked through. Cool. Blend in a food processor with the onion-shallot mixture and prunes until smooth. Add the eggs and blend again until smooth. Adjust seasonings to taste. Spread the pâté into a large ramekin, and garnish with a sprinkle of fresh thyme. Cover and chill before serving.



### Grilled Sweet-Potato Rounds With Chorizo

Substitute tempeh for the chorizo to make the perfect vegetarian bite.

Makes 12 rounds

- 1 pound sweet potatoes, sliced crosswise into ½-inch-thick rounds
- 1 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ can refried black beans
- ¼ cup minced roasted red bell peppers
- ¼ cup minced cured Spanish chorizo
- Zest and juice of one lime
- ½ cup grated queso fresco

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F and heat a cast-iron grill pan. Brush the sliced sweet potatoes with olive oil and grill about one to two minutes on each side. Heat the refried beans with the bell peppers, chorizo, and lime zest and juice until warm. Top each grilled sweet-potato slice with about 1 tablespoon of the chorizo mixture and some of the grated cheese. Arrange on a baking sheet and heat in the oven until cheese is softened. Serve warm.





### Charcuterie Plate

Arrange your favorite sliced meats on a platter. Always popular and no cooking involved!

Pair a variety of sliced, nitrate-free meats — like prosciutto, salami, and Spanish chorizo — with pâté, cornichons, olives, pickled beets, or grilled vegetables. Serve with whole-grain rye bread or crackers and some nice mustard.

### Dolmades With Collard Greens

These Greek-inspired appetizers are wonderful served with a cucumber-yogurt dipping sauce.

Makes 24 dolmades

- 24 collard green leaves (about 2 to 3 bunches), tough stems removed
- 2 cups cooked brown rice, quinoa, or millet
- ¼ cup currants
- ¼ cup toasted pine nuts
- ½ cup feta cheese crumbles
- Zest and juice of one lemon
- ½ cup chopped Italian parsley
- ¼ cup chopped mint
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Bring one quart of water to boil in a saucepan. Blanch the collard greens, two to three leaves at a time, for about one minute. Drain, shock in a bowl of ice water, and dry. Mix the rest of the ingredients together. Spoon 2 tablespoons of filling onto the center of each collard green and wrap up like a burrito. Secure the dolmades with a toothpick and chill until ready to serve.



### Caponata-Stuffed Potato Boats

Baby red potatoes are great vehicles for prepared caponata, artichoke dip, or ratatouille from your grocery-store deli.

Makes 24 potato boats

- 1 tsp. salt
- 12 baby red potatoes
- 1½ cups caponata or other filling of your choice
- ¼ cup chopped fresh chives

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. On the stovetop, heat 2 quarts water with the salt and simmer the potatoes until just tender. Drain and let cool. Cut the potatoes in half and scoop out the center with a melon baller. Fill the center with 1 tablespoon caponata. Place the potato boats on a sheet tray and warm in the oven. Sprinkle with chopped fresh chives before serving.



### Bacon-Wrapped Dates

You may also want to try these succulent little bites with dried figs instead of dates.

Makes 24 pieces

- 24 dates, pitted
- 4 oz. blue cheese crumbles
- 12 thin slices nitrate-free bacon, cut in half crosswise

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Line a baking sheet with foil. Make a lengthwise slit in each date with a paring knife and open just enough to stuff in ½ teaspoon of blue cheese. Wrap each date with a bacon slice and secure with a toothpick. Bake in the oven until the bacon is crisp and browned, about 10 to 12 minutes. Drain the dates on a paper towel for a few minutes. Serve warm. 🍴

All recipes were created by **Betsy Nelson** (a.k.a. “That Food Girl”), a Minneapolis-based food stylist and recipe developer.

### WEB EXTRA!

To see recipes for the marinated olives, roasted nuts, and mushroom pâté shown in this story, visit [ELmag.com/partyfood](http://ELmag.com/partyfood).



**NOTE:** Readers sometimes ask us why we don't publish calorie, carb, and fat counts with our recipes. We believe that if you're eating primarily whole, healthy foods (an array of sustainably raised vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, legumes, meats, fish, eggs, whole-kernel grains, and healthy fats and oils), you really don't need to stress about the numbers (which are often inaccurate or misleading anyway). We prefer to focus more on food quality and trust our bodies to tell us what we need. — Eds.