

HOLIDAY FLAVORS



Entertaining Advice

Holiday parties are fun ways to enjoy the company of family, friends and co-workers. And making the party a memorable occasion might be easier than you think.

Whether you're hosting a small family gathering, or a large group of friends, these tips will make you the host with the most.

DRINKS

Treat your guests to flavorful holiday drinks that warm their senses and bring a smile to their face. For a twist on traditional cider, break out the crock-pot.

Combine one gallon of apple cider with two cups of cranberry juice, 1/2 cup honey and 1/2 cup of sugar. Wrap orange peels, cloves and cinnamon sticks in cheesecloth, and put it in the pot, along with a diced or sliced apple. Season to taste with allspice, ginger and nutmeg, and let the brew simmer for 2-4 hours before serving in mugs.

For a delicious dessert drink, peppermint milkshakes are a big hit. Combine vanilla or chocolate ice cream, milk and peppermint candies in a blender. Blend to the desired consistency, ensuring that the peppermints are adequately chopped. Topped with whipped cream, these shakes are sure to please.

APPETIZERS

Small, bite-sized foods can

play a big role at your party while keeping guests from nibbling on the main course. With some creative thinking, you can add holiday flair to traditional snacks or offer something your guests never expected. Here are some ideas to consider:

Who doesn't love eating dessert before the meal? You can make miniature treats out of your favorite pie fillings. Simply use puff pastry dough, shaped into small disks, and line the insides of an oiled miniature muffin pan. Fill the cups with apple, cherry or other pie filling. For

a holiday twist, use pumpkin or pecan pie filling. Bake these petite treats until the filling has set, then remove them from the oven and let them cool before serving.

Wantons make great finger foods and are quite easy to make. To make sweet and savory holiday snacks, mix cream cheese, shredded ham (or bacon) and green onions in a bowl, and season to

taste with salt, pepper and garlic. Fold a teaspoon of the mixture into each wonton skin and seal the edges with water. Deep fry the finished wontons at 350-degrees for 10-15 seconds. Serve these with a simple apricot sauce made of apricot preserves, fresh ginger and red wine vinegar.

Canapés are a classy alternative to finger sandwiches,

and their open-faced style makes them visually appealing. Cut flatbread into bite-sized triangles and top with various spreads such as cream cheese, pimento cheese spread or pesto sauce. You can use a pastry bag with a decorative tip to add style to the canapés. Then add your choice of meat or vegetables, or both.



Cooking With Family

Food brings families together, but preparing food together brings families closer. And who doesn't like having plenty of readily available holiday sweets around the house?

Desserts and other sweets offer plenty of family cooking opportunities. Here are some ideas for bringing your family together in the kitchen.

DIP IT

Chocolate-covered pretzels are great snacks to place around the house and also make fun gift bags for friends and co-workers.

Make these salty-sweet goodies by melting semi-sweet baking chocolate squares in a double boiler pot or microwave-safe bowl. While the chocolate is melting, lay out a long strip of waxed paper, and gather a couple of unfolded paper clips or ornament hangers. After the chocolate is melted, place a handful of pretzels into the chocolate and use a spoon to make sure each pretzel is covered.

Now use the ornament hangers or paper clips to pull the pretzels out of the chocolate, being sure to let excess chocolate drip away. Place the pretzels on the wax paper to cool.

For extra style, melt white chocolate as well. Use a fine tip with a pastry bag to drizzle white chocolate over the brown chocolate pretzels, and vice versa.



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CANDIED RINDS

Candied citrus rinds are easy to make, fun to eat and also make attractive decorations for other holiday foods.

Families can work together to peel the rinds in large sections from oranges, lemons, limes and grapefruits. Use a sharp knife to remove the bitter white pith from the rinds

and cut them into long 1/4-inch strips.

Combine 4-1/4 cups of water with 2-1/2 cups of white sugar in a saucepan over medium-high heat until the mixture begins to boil. Reduce the heat to low, add the peels and simmer for roughly two hours until the syrup is barely covering the

rinds. After cooling, drain the rinds and then dredge them in a bowl with about one cup of sugar.

Place the rinds on a cookie sheet covered with wax paper and let them sit overnight. The candied rinds are ready to eat, or you can also dip them in melted baking chocolate for another level of flavor.

CANDIED PECANS

Candied pecans also make enticing treats, as well as yummy filler for gift tins. In a bowl, beat one egg white until stiff. Combine 1/2 cup of brown sugar, 1/2 teaspoon of ground cinnamon and a dash of vanilla extract into the beaten egg white.

Stir in four cups of pecan halves until all the pecans are covered. Pour the nuts onto greased wax paper in a cookie sheet. Bake at 275-degrees until browned, ten to fifteen minutes. After cooling, these delicious snacks are sure to drive you nuts!

POPCORN STRINGS

Stringing together popcorn to decorate the Christmas tree is an age-old family tradition. In modern times, the popcorn is often made in the microwave or other quick methods.

To add family fun, let children help as you make the popcorn on the stove in a pan with a clear lid. The anticipation of seeing the first kernel pop will bring a big smile to their faces — and more giggles as the pan quickly fills with popcorn.

Global Christmas

Various cultures celebrate Christmas in many different ways, with a vast array of holiday food faire. Yet, regardless of their culinary traditions, cultural groups around the world gather together for Christmas and the days prior, to celebrate family, friends and community.

Whether you're hosting an ethnically diverse family gathering, or just want to try something new, here's a look at Christmas food traditions across the globe.

NEARBY

Our North American neighbors offer food traditions that are both similar to American Christmas offerings, as well as foods that are quite different.

In Canada, typical Christmas meals consist of

roasted turkey or chicken with a variety of vegetable and roasted potatoes. In French-speaking areas, the evening before Christmas is celebrated with a réveillon, which is a long dinner honoring the tradition of staying awake past midnight.

These meals often include luxurious foods such as lobster, oysters and foie gras. A buche de noel is a French yule log filled with buttercream, and is often served for dessert.



the holiday celebration. Culinary traditions include fragrant dumpling soups and various sausages. Turkey and goose dishes are accented with bacon and duck fat, and braised with wine, sauerkraut, apples and onions. The meal is completed with hot mulled wine and German butter cookies.

GREAT BRITAIN

British Christmas meals are somewhat similar to American cuisine. The meal may feature a bacon-covered roast turkey and goose is also a popular bird.

Side dishes include brussels sprouts, roasted potatoes and cranberry sauces. Dessert will typically include a rich, fruity pudding doused in flaming brandy, which is said to ward off evil spirits.

Regardless of your family's heritage, cultures from around the world offer many ways to accentuate your Christmas dining experience this year. Acknowledging these customs can honor your family's background, as well as creating interesting conversation amongst your guests.

RECIPE

COQUITO

MAKES 5 CUPS

Give a tropical twist to your egg nog this year, by making Coquito, a Puerto Rican drink flavored with coconut and rum.

INGREDIENTS

2 cups coconut milk
1 14-oz. can sweetened condensed milk
2 cups Puerto Rican rum
4 egg yolks, lightly beaten
Ground cinnamon and sticks, to garnish

INSTRUCTIONS

Blend milks, rum, and yolks in a blender until frothy; chill. Pour into glasses, sprinkle with cinnamon, and serve with cinnamon sticks.

Mexican culinary traditions also vary upon different regions, but may consist of turkey, tamales and various fruits and sweet foods. The turkey is often stuffed with ground meat, olives and raisins, or a chestnut dressing.

Pasteles are tamales made with green bananas and pork. Another favorite is the buñuelo, which is a fried fritter with a variety of fillings and topped with honey, cinnamon and sugar.

EUROPE

In Italy, Christmas Eve dinner is always "in bianco," or white. These meals have no meat, instead featuring only fish, vegetables, grains and cheeses. Popular dishes include orange and lemon salads, and roasted artichokes. Christmas dinner typically features soup enhanced with stuffed pasta or dumplings.

The Christmas meal in Germany is an integral part of

Healthy Holidays

Many folks stress over the holidays, but not because of the hustle and bustle. Instead, they're worried about straying from their diet or fitness regime, or gaining unwanted pounds from the smorgasbord of delicious dining delicacies.

Nonetheless, no one wants to miss out on his or her favorite seasonal foods. Whether you're concerned about busting a button, or you'd like to get an early start on your New Year's resolution, here are some easy ways to stay trim during the holidays.

KEEP IT REAL

First of all, keep your expectations realistic. It's very likely that you'll be exposed to a bevy of holiday parties, meals and family gatherings. Rather than trying to lose weight

during this time of year, focus on simply maintaining your weight.

After the holidays you can begin a workout schedule if you'd like to lose a few pounds, and you'll have less temptations to negate your efforts. That's not to say that you can't be proactive about burning a few calories between meals.

Instead of lounging on the couch before or after

your holiday meal, get some exercise to counteract those Christmas calories by tossing a football around with friends, or take a long walk while you catch up with that relative that you haven't seen in a few years.

EAT CONSISTENTLY

Don't skip meals leading up to your holiday dinner. You may avoid taking in calories, but you're also more likely to binge eat when faced with a large feast.

To avoid overeating, eat a late breakfast or lunch so that you won't be as hungry. Also, before preparing your plate, survey the food offerings and make note of what you really want to eat, as

opposed to other dishes that you could do without.

Finally, give yourself sensible portions, eating until you're satisfied and no longer hungry, instead of when you're stuffed.

DRINKS

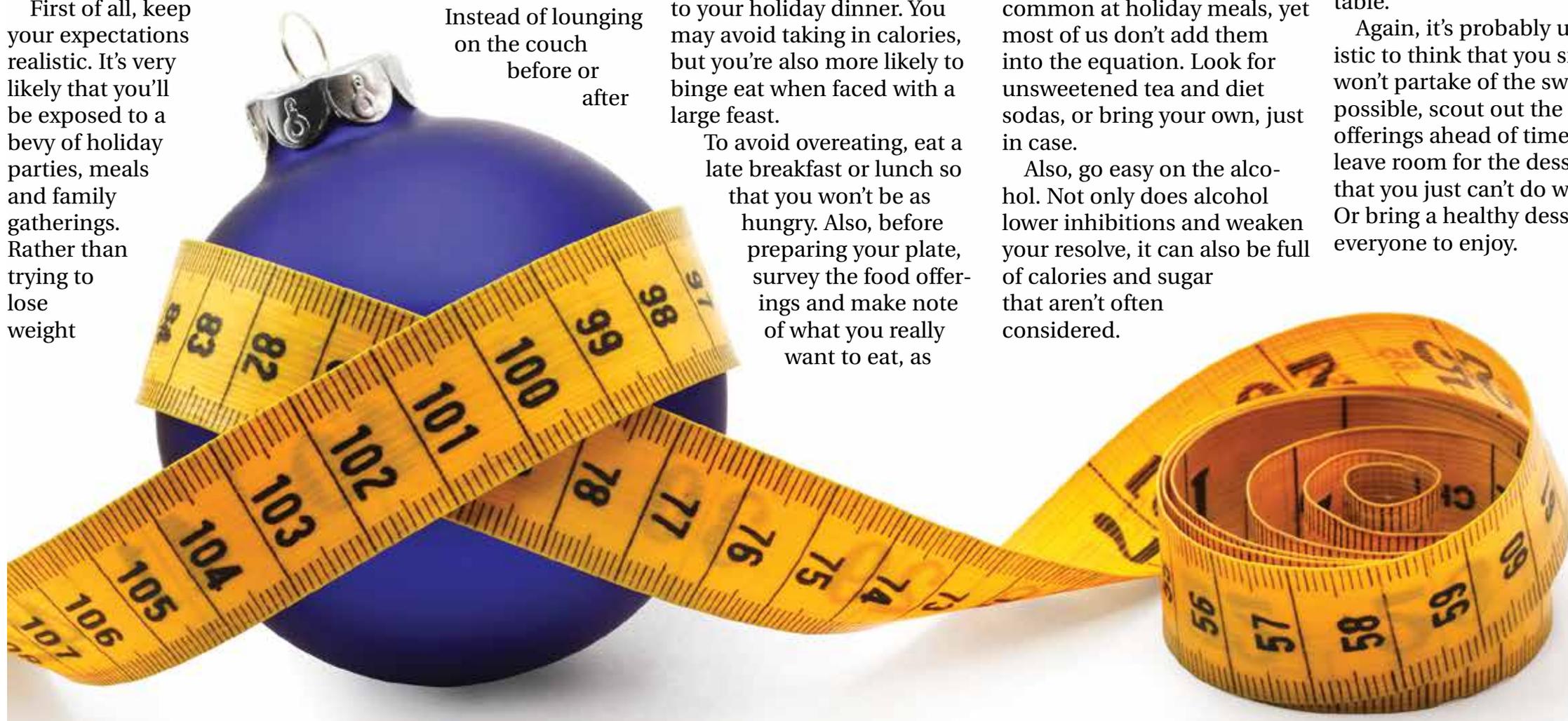
Be mindful of the beverages. Sweet tea and sodas are common at holiday meals, yet most of us don't add them into the equation. Look for unsweetened tea and diet sodas, or bring your own, just in case.

Also, go easy on the alcohol. Not only does alcohol lower inhibitions and weaken your resolve, it can also be full of calories and sugar that aren't often considered.

DESSERT

Lastly, how many people actually listen when they're told to leave room for dessert? Most of us conveniently forget that there will be plenty of treats following the main course. But if you're trying to stay off of the naughty list this year, remember to plan accordingly for the dessert table.

Again, it's probably unrealistic to think that you simply won't partake of the sweets. If possible, scout out the dessert offerings ahead of time, and leave room for the dessert that you just can't do without. Or bring a healthy dessert for everyone to enjoy.



Non-Traditional Foods

If you're just not into the traditional holiday meal with roasted turkey, stuffing and cranberry sauce, there are many other great food options to entice your taste buds this season.

THINK GOOSE

These days, Christmas meals typically feature turkey or ham. But for many years, a roasted goose was the bird of choice.

Goose has quite a different flavor profile than turkey, being more akin to duck, and

likewise consisting of all dark meat. When preparing goose, cook the bird on a rack in a roasting pan with the breast-side down so that the fats render down and drip across the breast meat, keeping it moist.

Periodically use the juices in the bottom of the pan to braise the top and sides of the bird to

form a crispy skin, which also helps to lock in moisture.

COMFORT FOODS

Traditional holiday foods typically evoke a sense of comfort. Thusly, other comfort foods are a great choice for supplementing customary Christmas dishes.

A creamy macaroni and cheese casserole enhanced with fresh bacon or ham can please the palette and warm the soul. Stuffed cabbage filled with a ground beef and pork mixture and topped with tomato and basil sauce is another welcoming dish.

FOREIGN DISHES

Asian and Mexican themed meals are also popu-

lar supplements to conventional holiday meals. Both cuisines are great for preparing family-style dining options and are sure to leave your guests satisfied and full. Furthermore, both flavor profiles offer excellent themes for preparing traditional foods such as turkey, ham, stuffing and other side dishes in a non-traditional way.

A TWIST ON TRADITIONAL

In recent years, deep-fried turkeys have become more and more popular. When properly cooked, the hot oil quickly seals in the bird's juices, resulting in more flavor and moisture. You may also

choose to inject other flavors into the meat before frying.

Additionally, many families enjoy smoked hams or turkeys, which have been slowly cooked over low heat, allowing the meat to be permeated with the smoky flavor of your choice of wood. Popular choices include hickory and oak wood, as well as fruity woods such as pecan, apple and cherry.

Also, braising meats can significantly change the flavor profile. Try braising the meat with fruity flavors by using orange or pineapple juices. A wide variety of flavored liqueurs can also add unexpected flavors to your main course, such as those infused with pecans, fruits and even sweet tea flavors.

RECIPE

PINEAPPLE & CHIPOTLE GLAZED HAM

SERVES 15-20

INGREDIENTS

- 1 12-15 lb. whole semi-boneless ham
- 8 fresh or canned pineapple slices
- 64 whole cloves
- 2 3/4 cups Coca-Cola
- 2 chipotle peppers in adobo, drained and finely chopped
- 1/3 cup honey

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Place ham into a 16-quart pot. Cover with water and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low, and simmer for 1 hour.
2. Heat oven to 350°. Transfer ham to a rack in a roasting pan. Using toothpicks, secure pineapple to ham and stud with cloves. Pour 2 cups Coca-Cola over the ham, and pour 1 cup of water into pan. Cover loosely with foil. Bake for 1 hour.
3. Meanwhile, combine the remaining Coca-Cola, chipotles, and honey in a 2 qt. saucepan, bringing to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium and cook, stirring the glaze to syrup consistency, roughly 12-15 minutes. Uncover the ham and brush with some of the glaze. Increase oven to 500°. Bake the ham, brushing occasionally with glaze, until browned and glossy, around 15-20 minutes. Let cool for 20 minutes before carving.



The Right Look

When it comes to food, people tend to consume with their eyes first and their mouths second. You've put a lot of effort into this year's holiday meal, and with a little imagination, you can make your foods as visually appealing as they are flavorful.

The first essential step toward beautifully plated dishes is properly prepared food. Overcooked foods are often difficult to arrange and may not look as appetizing as they should. Also, look for opportunities to cut meats and vegetables into interesting shapes, and use cutting molds to shape side dishes such as rice, potatoes and pastas.

SHOW IT OFF

One easy way to showcase your food is to reevaluate how you place items on your dishes. Showcasing food in the middle of a plate, with empty space around it, will draw more attention to the featured item.

If multiple items make up the dish, find a playful way for the various ingredients to interact. For example, rest a portion of beef roast on a pillow of creamed potatoes with steamed or roasted petite carrots leaning to the side.

Also, when creating a snack tray, consider arranging the vegetables, meats and cheeses into an artistic layout relating to the holiday. For instance, broccoli florets can be arranged in the shape of a



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Christmas tree, with grape tomatoes serving as ornaments, while square shaped meats and cheeses serve as gifts under the tree.

THE EXTRAS

Sauces, gravies, garnishes and crumbs can be artfully added to the plate before or after plating for added flair.

For desserts, experiment

with different sauces to incorporate designs onto the plate before placing the food down. One such technique is to place a thin layer of creamy white chocolate sauce onto your plate, and then add concentric circles of milk chocolate on top. Use a toothpick to pull straight lines from the middle to the outside edge to create a webbed design.

Another option is to place

alternating half-inch dots of chocolate and raspberry sauce evenly around the edge of the plate. Then, by dragging a toothpick through the dots, you'll create beautiful hearts to adorn your dish.

PRESENTATION

Wine glasses provide an elegant presentation when used to serve simple desserts

like banana pudding, fruit salads and milkshakes. Coffee cups are a fun way to serve hearty helpings of pies and cakes topped with ice cream. You can also use shot glasses to serve bite-sized portions of chocolate mousse, fruit chutneys, and other desserts.

You can create serving vessels out of other foods as well. Partially hollow out a halved watermelon to make a functional fruit salad container, or serve thicker soups and dips in a bread bowl. Additionally, tomatoes and bell peppers make beautiful and edible containers for salads and cheese blends.

Finally, don't forget about the environment around your food. Decorate your table with a holiday theme, or create a table scene that adds fun to your holiday buffet.

Extra tree ornaments, garland and Christmas lights set against a green tablecloth are another quick and inexpensive way to add charm to your food presentation. You can also create a winter wonderland scene around your dishes, using miniature trees, figurines and other supplies from a craft store.

Stress-Free Cooking

The holidays are supposed to be “the most wonderful time of the year,” but preparing a holiday meal can take some of the joy out of spending time with loved ones. However, with a bit of planning, you can enjoy more time with your family this year without stressing over the food.

PLAN A TIMELINE

When preparing a large meal, a common mistake is not establishing a timeline for the entire meal’s cooking process. Your goal is to have everything come together at the same time, with warm foods ready to serve alongside any other dishes that may have been prepared ahead of time.

After planning your menu, note each item’s preparation and cooking times. Next, decide when you’d like everything ready to serve. From there, work backward to create a chronological outline detailing the times when each item must be started and finished, along with any key times for checking the progress of slow-cooked items, such as meats or casseroles.

Additionally, make note of any dishes that have similar cooking times and temperatures, as these may be dishes that can be cooked at the same time.

GET ORGANIZED

Clean out the refrigerator a few days before the holiday. Get rid of leftovers and other clutter to make room for storing food and items that will



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be needed for your holiday meal. Consider using a large cooler to hold cold drinks, to provide additional space.

Review each recipe’s ingredients and check your pantry to see what you have in stock. Make a cumulative grocery list for the items you lack. Making multiple trips to the store is an unnecessary stress that can be avoided.

Be sure that your knives are

sharp, and that you have an assortment of cutting boards, measuring cups and cooking utensils. You may also want to consider the types of pots and pans you’ll need, and how many you’ll need at one time.

COOK AHEAD

Many dishes such as casseroles and pies can be cooked a day or two ahead of the actual holiday, and then

reheated prior to serving time.

Turkeys and hams can be cooked the day before, as well as being sliced and plated. You can save the meat’s juices, using them before and during reheating, to keep the meats from drying out.

SERVING

Now that your holiday

meal is ready to serve, don’t be the last one to the table. Enjoy the meal with your family by serving the food in one of two ways.

Utilize a separate table to line up the various dishes so that folks can work their way down the table as they fill their plate. If you don’t have an extra table, try creating your buffet along the countertops in your kitchen. Be sure to place the plates at the head of the line, with silverware and napkins at the end of the line.

If you’re the type of host who prefers to prepare each plate for your guests, choose a few steady-handed volunteers to form an assembly line. The plates will be ready faster, the food will still be hot, and you’ll be at the table with your family in no time.

GET HELP

Bribe a couple of family members into helping with the dishes by allowing them to be the first in line for dessert. The extra help will make cleaning up quick and easy, and you won’t be left high and dry while everyone else is watching football or napping.