

# Potluck Ideas

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## Potluck Event Organization Ideas

Spring and summer are often enjoyed by gathering families and friends together. The next time you have to plan a potluck event it is important to be organized. Use these potluck event organization ideas to help you have a successful meal.

Plan when the potluck event will be. Schedule a specific time for the event to begin so everyone is present with their food before the meal begins. It is also a good idea to have a specific time for the event to end. Do everything within your power to ensure the meal begins when you said it would.

Make a menu for the main part of the meal. Ask a few people you know will be there to provide specific side dishes. Then make a list of who is bringing other dishes. Depending upon the reason for the potluck, you may have people coming from long distances. It would help to know who is planning to attend and what dish they will provide. If there are too many bowls of potato salad, you might want to ask someone to bring another dish.

Provide the entrée for the potluck. This will ensure that the entrée will be available for the potluck. To be sure, because emergencies can happen, you may want to ask someone else to bring an entrée as well.

It is always a good idea to plan to take more than one item to a potluck. Prepare a tossed salad or pick up a pie or two to be on the safe side. You will want to choose extra items you and your family will eat the following week in case everyone brings what they said they would.

Instead of planning a complete meal for the potluck, why not plan a desserts and coffee event? There are no hard and fast rules about what a potluck must consist of. This type of potluck will allow for people arriving late. It won't matter if they arrive half-hour late with a new pie. Everyone will simply have something else to try.

Keep the potluck informal and fun. Most people don't want to feel uncomfortable at potlucks. To keep things light, place disposable cameras around on the tables so everyone can take pictures. Plan to have the film developed for those who don't have access to the internet or have the pictures stored on a CD so you can send digital photos through email.

Ask the guests to write down the recipe for their dish on enough recipe cards and have a recipe card swap. There may be someone in the family who always brings a specific dish everyone loves. Put the recipes near the dish so people will know what they are eating. Each person can take a recipe card or you can get the recipes and put together a potluck cookbook.

Planning a potluck event can be time consuming and frustrating. Once the event is over, however, you will soon forget any problems or frustrations. You may even hear yourself offering to organize the event next year.

## How to Feed a Crowd on a Budget

Family reunions and covered dish dinners requires enough food to feed a crowd. The problem becomes how to feed a crowd on a budget and still prepare food everyone will enjoy. The following hints might make that task much easier to accomplish.

Determine how much money you have budgeted for the event and stick to that amount. Plan to spend about \$5.00 per person and multiply that number by how many you expect. If there are going to be 25 or more people, that could get rather expensive - \$125. Most people wouldn't be able to afford that for meal.

Plan a menu if you'll be doing most of the cooking. Preparing a menu will help you purchase items at the least amount possible and yet ensure you have everything you need. Having a planned menu also enables you to take advantage of sale prices on certain items which can reduce the overall cost for food.

Rather than one family being responsible for all of the food it would be helpful to have each family prepare one or two dishes. Someone may want to keep a list to ensure there is a good variety of food. Having everyone chip in also means no one family must bear the brunt of the cost. This will also ensure the Aunt Betty can rest assured no one else will make her famous macaroni and cheese that she makes each year.

Whenever possible, use store brand items rather than name brand foods. Store brands are often considerably less than the better-known brands. In most cases the people at your event won't recognize the difference.

Choose a meal that is inexpensive. For instance, spaghetti is one meal that won't break the family budget. Two and 1/2 pounds of noodles will cost approximately \$3.00, sauce will be about \$4.00, garlic bread may be around \$4.00 and meat will probably run about \$7.00. Considering the total price – less than \$20.00 – you could feasibly provide an entrée for 25 people.

Casseroles are also a good choice for feeding a crowd on a budget. You can put together a large (pan of lasagna for about \$40.00 and it would feed up to 30 people. Serve a tossed salad with the lasagna and another vegetable to round out the meal.

The above ideas might be helpful when you have to feed a crowd on a budget. You may be able to come up with other ideas by talking with others who will attend your event but these can get your thoughts started. Remember to stick to your budget and ask others to provide some of the foods so you don't have to pay for everything all by yourself.

## Choosing a Covered Dish for Your Reunion

If your family reunions are like most, there is probably an over abundance of deviled eggs or potato salad. What covered dish can you bring instead? If you are faced with choosing a covered dish for your reunion you may want to try any of the following ideas.

- Prepare peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. This might seem like a silly suggestion but there are usually picky toddlers to contend with. If you make a plate of PB&J sandwiches, you can bet even the picky eaters will have something on their plate.
- Cut up in-season fresh fruit. Place it on a large platter and make a delicious dip using an 8-ounce box of softened cream cheese and two 7-ounce jars of marshmallow fluff. Nearly everyone loves fresh fruit so it is unlikely you will have to take any home with you.
- Tossed green salads are another covered dish you might want to consider preparing. Salads don't require as much diligence in keeping them cold so they are often a good option especially if the weather is warm. Of course, if you do take a salad, it would be best to purchase non-mayonnaise type dressings.
- Corn on the cob is something many people enjoy. You can purchase a dozen ears of corn, break them in half and have enough for several people. Be sure to leave the corn in a small amount of hot water in the pan and wrap the pan with newspaper and a towel to keep them warm. Try not to forget the butter for the corn.
- Baked beans usually go over well at family reunions, too. You may want to prepare two dishes of baked beans – one pan made with bacon and one without for those who don't eat pork.
- A pasta salad of some type would also be a welcome addition to your family reunion. There are many different pasta salad recipes to choose from. Look around and try to find something that hasn't been prepared in the past.
- Tomato, Avocado and Mango salsa is a cool, tasty option. Of course, you could also prepare homemade tomato salsa. Take blue corn chips as an alternative to other chips.
- Remember that some people in your family may have diabetes so you will want to have at least one or two dessert options for them.
- Most places family reunions are held have electricity available. You may want to ask several family members to provide electric ice cream makers so you can make homemade ice cream. You can prepare several different ice cream bases and have them chilled and ready to put in the maker when everyone is ready for it.

Do your best to keep everyone healthy during and after the family reunion by keeping foods safe. Bacteria begin to be a problem after cold foods reach 40 degrees or hot foods fall below 140 degrees.

## Everyday Meals You Can Convert for Potlucks or Reunions

Family reunions and potlucks are events many people look forward to each year. Where else can you enjoy such an assortment of wonderful foods for very little money out of your pocket? Try these everyday meals which can be converted for potlucks or reunions the next time you have one of these events to attend.

Many reunions or potlucks will have at least two or three different plates of deviled eggs. Have you ever noticed how some of them don't look so appetizing after sliding around in the cooler? There's a way to fix that – make them in stages. Here's how:

- Boil your eggs the night before and then remove the yolks.
- The day of the reunion, mix up yolk according to your recipe but place the mixture in a zip top bag.
- When you arrive at the reunion you can lay the eggs out on the tray. Snip a corner of the bag off and use it similar to a piping bag.
- Top the deviled eggs with a sprinkle of paprika and they're good to go!

What do you do about a recipe your family loves? How do you change it from a recipe for five to a recipe for 30? The simplest way to increase a recipe is to multiply each measurement in the recipe by the increase you'd like to make. Divide the number of people to be served by the number of people served in the original recipe. If a recipe serves five and you need to feed 30, you would need to multiply everything by 6 to get the correct amounts.

One thing to remember when increasing a recipe is to make the recipe in batches rather than trying to make everything at once. Most people don't have a kitchen large enough to bake to make 30 servings at once.

Think about people who may have food allergies or preferences. Try to find recipes that everyone can enjoy. If the dish you want to prepare does contain a food that is a known allergen, place a sign by the dish which lists the ingredients. Common allergy foods are gluten, shellfish and peanuts. By indicating the food has a particular ingredient you are ensuring someone with an allergy will know to steer clear of that dish. You may also want to indicate if the meat in a dish is beef or pork as well if a dish is vegetarian or vegan.

There are many things to consider when preparing a dish for a potluck or reunion. Can you take a recipe your family loves and convert it to a big hit at the reunion? Sure you can! Think about what you are taking, how to get it there so it looks appetizing, and label the ingredients for those with allergies or food preferences. You can enjoy the meal knowing you've done your part to provide a great dish for everyone to enjoy.

## The Best Ways to Transport Food to Reunions and Social Gatherings

Does your family get together for reunions each year? If so, you may be concerned about how to transport food to reunions or other social gatherings and keep them safe for everyone to eat. Try these ideas when sharing food with a large group.

Keeping Foods Cold means keeping them at or below 40 °F

- Use the foods you serve to help keep the food safe. Add frozen peas in a green salad. Make the salad as you normally would but don't allow the peas to thaw first. If you will not be eating for a while, the frozen peas will thaw and keep your salad cold until it is time to eat.
- Pre-cool the cooler before you begin packing it. Add a plastic bag with ice to the cooler and leave it closed for a while. Once you are ready to pack the cooler, think about what you will need first. Set items in the cooler in the opposite order of what you expect to need them. Items you need first will be taken out and the remaining items left in the cooler until later.
- Place ice packs or smaller bags of ice in the bottom of the cooler before adding food. Then add the food or pre-cooled drinks into the cooler. After the food is in the cooler, place more ice on top before closing the cooler for transport.
- Avoid transporting the cooler in the trunk. It would be much better to keep it in the backseat so the air conditioning in the car will help the items in the cooler remain cool. You may even want to insulate the cooler by placing a blanket around it.
- Fill the cooler as full as possible to help it remain cold longer. As long as the cold foods remain cold – those which have mayonnaise or dairy products – they should be safe for your family and friends to eat.

Keeping Foods Hot means keeping hot food at or above 140 °F

- Use a casserole dish with a carrying case. The case will probably have items to keep foods cold or warm. Remember to heat up the hot pack and place it in the carrying case right before you leave to provide as much heat as possible against the casserole dish.
- Use an insulated cooler to keep food items warm as well as cold items cool. Wrap the warmed dishes with towels or newspaper to help insulate and keep the dishes warm. Pack the dishes as tightly as possible so the heat from one dish will help the others remain warm, as well.

You will enjoy your family get-together or reunion more knowing that the food you have prepared is safe to eat. Knowing how to keep foods hot or cold while transporting them will maintain their safety.

## Portable Coolers That Have the Consumers Thumbs Up

While there are many coolers big and small, hard and collapsible, the bottom line is you want the best cooler that is going to keep your food and drinks coldest the longest.

Depending on where you are going, how long you are going to be and how much supplies you have to keep cold you may need a variety of coolers. A flimsy collapsible cooler bag is not going to withstand a hot one week camping trip and stay cold. Before you purchase any type of cooler know what your expectations are for the cooler so you can buy accordingly. Typically hard shell coolers are best for longer usage, whereas nylon cooler bags will be suitable for a one night backyard barbecue party with friends.

Let's look at two of the biggest name brand cooler manufacturers and which of their coolers scored the highest ratings of 5/5, according to consumer feedback from Amazon.com and/or Consumersearch.com.

### Coleman

<b>Model</b>	<b>Shell</b>	<b>Capacity Plus Ice</b>	<b>Price</b>
<b>150 Qt Marine</b>	Hard	223 Cans	\$335
<b>150 Qt Heritage XP H20</b>	Hard	129 Cans	\$250
<b>100 Qt Xtreme</b>	Hard	130 Cans	\$170
<b>82 Qt Xtreme Ultimate</b>	Hard	106 Cans	\$105
<b>50 Qt Wheeled</b>	Hard	60 Cans	\$55
<b>50 Qt Wheeled Ultimate Xtreme</b>	Hard	72 Cans	\$90
<b>50 Quart Cooler</b>	Hard	71 Cans	\$59
<b>48 Quart Cooler</b>	Hard	63 Cans	\$40
<b>40 Quart Wheeled</b>	Hard	59 Cans	\$43
<b>36 Quart Molded Handle</b>	Hard	46 Cans	\$33
<b>18 Qt Party Stacker</b>	Hard	20 Cans	\$18
<b>16 Qt All American</b>	Hard	22 Cans	\$34

<b>16 Qt Excursion</b>	Hard	22 Cans	\$30
<b>1 Gallon Jug</b>	Hard	1 Gallon	\$15

## Igloo

<b>Model</b>	<b>Shell</b>	<b>Capacity Plus Ice</b>	<b>Price</b>
<b>Real Tree Hard Liner</b>	Soft	48 Cans	\$89
<b>Real Tree Duffle Cooler</b>	Soft	24 Cans	\$83
<b>Real Tree Soft Cooler</b>	Soft	18 Cans	\$32
<b>Shopper Tote</b>	Soft	30 Cans	\$17
<b>10 Gallon 400 Series</b>	Hard	10 Gallons	\$63
<b>5 Gallon Max Cold</b>	Hard	5 Gallons	\$40
<b>1 Gallon 11029 Elite Beverage</b>	Hard	1 Gallon	\$16
<b>4 Qt Mini Playmate</b>	Hard	6 Cans	\$12
<b>7Qt Playmate Pal</b>	Hard	9 Cans	\$30
<b>16 Qt Playmate Elite</b>	Hard	30 Cans	\$24
<b>12 Qt Ice Cube</b>	Hard	12 Cans	\$27
<b>28 Qt Island Breezer</b>	Hard	37 Cans	\$43
<b>54 Qt 44320 Legend</b>	Hard	54 Quarts	\$54

Keep in mind all of these cooler types scored 5/5. If a product type is not on this list for these 2 brands regardless of the size or shell type, then they did not score a perfect 5/5. This list should give you an idea of where you are going to get your money's worth when you are shopping for coolers. This list also gives you a large variety of sizes and styles to suit your needs. I hope this makes your cooler shopping a breeze.