

In GOOD TASTE

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As I celebrate 42 years of hospitality and catering, people often ask, “What is your favorite time of the day or type of event?” I quickly answer, “Brunch.” I recall some of my most memorable weddings and events that took place around noon, or parties that prompted everyone’s favorite breakfast foods and drinks, which were refreshing and seasonal.

If you love a beautiful outdoor setting for a party, or if keeping down costs is a priority, then brunch satisfies those concerns, as well as everyone’s palate. We have included four of our favorites in this Masters issue, which are also featured in our new cookbook, *The VeryVera Cookbook: Generations*; and as the name suggests, all age groups will love these recipes.

TIPS FOR BRUNCH ENTERTAINING

- Present a combination of hot and cold food items, as well as sweet and savory.
- Consider setting up the buffet with side dishes first and ending with protein choices. Consider color as well when arranging items for a visually appealing display.
- When seating is a concern, keeping food options to bite-size/salad fork-size allows guests to eat away from the table, if necessary. Decide on shaded areas of the yard or line short walls with cushions for additional seating, which is a great alternative. Lap trays are always an option.
- Hot and cold beverages should be conveniently located; for serving cocktails or wine, consider hiring a bartender for 50 guests or more.
- Utilize personal window boxes as part of your landscape design to reduce floral costs.

WORDS OF WISDOM

As a newlywed (and beyond), when I started my catering business, design presentation was my passion. I loved creating a menu and preparing food, but creating a beautifully designed table for seating and the buffet was the most rewarding part for me. I wish now, though, that I had invested along the way in small sets — six to eight individual dishes and glasses that reflected certain themes or patterns. Now that I’m older and wiser, I shop at Replacements, Ltd. and add pieces to my collection.



Cheese GRITS

Prep Time: 10 minutes | **Cook Time:** 25 minutes | **Yield:** 4 to 6 servings

INGREDIENTS

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| 4 cups low-sodium chicken broth | ½ cup Parmesan cheese, hand-shredded |
| 1 cup Quaker® Old-Fashioned grits | |
| 1 cup sharp cheddar cheese, hand-shredded | 2 Tbsp. unsalted butter |
| | Salt and pepper, to taste |

DIRECTIONS

1. In a large saucepan, bring chicken broth to a full rolling boil.
2. Whisk in grits and beat vigorously for 30 seconds.
3. Reduce heat to medium-low.
4. Cook, stirring constantly, for 2 minutes.
5. Reduce heat to low and cook for 20 more minutes, stirring frequently to prevent sticking.
6. Stir in the cheeses and butter.
7. Season to taste and serve immediately.

TIPS

- Seasoning to taste means that you choose how much seasoning to add, depending on what you like and the flavors of the other ingredients. Different chicken stock brands vary in salt and flavor, so you may need to adjust the amount of salt.
- Grits are best served right away, as they will get too thick if you let them rest before serving. You can revive them by whisking in evaporated milk or chicken stock.
- Use a Crock-Pot® to reheat or keep them warm. Spray the Crock-Pot® insert with nonstick spray and add your grits. Stir occasionally with heat set to low. It holds for up to 3 hours.



Grape SALAD

Creamy and crunchy, this side dish is perfect for casual lunches and pairs well with sandwiches and other salads.

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Yield: 4 to 6 servings, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup each

INGREDIENTS

- 4 oz. sour cream
- 4 oz. cream cheese, room temperature
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup granulated sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. vanilla extract
- 2 lbs. red and/or green seedless grapes, washed and de-stemmed
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup brown sugar, for garnish
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped pecans, optional for garnish

DIRECTIONS

1. In a large bowl, whisk to combine the sour cream, cream cheese, granulated sugar and vanilla until creamy.
2. Gently fold in the grapes and mix lightly until they are coated.
3. Cover and store in the refrigerator until ready to serve.
4. Top with brown sugar and pecans (if using) right before serving.

TIPS

- What does room temperature cream cheese mean? Take the cream cheese out of the refrigerator for at least 3-4 hours. It should be soft and no longer cold to the touch by the time you are ready to use.
- If you add the brown sugar too soon it will dissolve and look runny, so be sure to wait until just before serving and use as a garnish.



Best Pancakes EVER!

Prep Time: 15 minutes

Cook Time: 20 minutes

Yield: 8, 4-inch pancakes

INGREDIENTS

1 cup all-purpose flour
1 Tbsp. granulated sugar
1 tsp. baking powder
¼ tsp. baking soda
½ tsp. salt
1 egg
1 cup buttermilk
2 Tbsp. vegetable oil, plus more as needed
for cooking
4 Tbsp. of salted butter, sliced into 8 pats
Maple syrup for serving

DIRECTIONS

1. In a large mixing bowl, stir together flour, sugar, baking powder, soda and salt.
2. In a separate small mixing bowl, beat egg with a fork until yolk and white are blended. Add buttermilk and oil to the egg, then mix with a fork until well combined.
3. Add the egg mixture to the dry ingredients. Stir with a wooden spoon until combined, but still a bit lumpy.
4. Add the vegetable oil to a skillet or griddle and heat over medium heat until you notice the oil getting shimmery and the skillet is hot.
5. Measuring by a ¼ cup, pour batter onto the hot skillet. Cook until the pancake has a bubbly surface and the edges look slightly dry.
6. Add a pat of butter to the top of the pancake and carefully flip with a spatula.
7. Continue to cook the pancake until the bottom is golden brown. Remove from heat and set aside to finish cooking the remaining pancakes.
8. Serve with syrup and favorite toppings.

TIPS

- Try adding fresh blueberries or chocolate chips for a special ingredient. Just toss a few on each pancake while the first side is cooking, flip and voilà!
- For another twist on this classic breakfast, check out Nestle's TOLL HOUSE® Pancake recipe featured on page 176 of *The VeryVera Occasions* cookbook.
- Use a tea towel to cover the stack of cooked pancakes while you work on finishing the rest of them. This keeps them warm and prevents dry pancakes!

French Toast STICKS

Prep Time: 10 minutes | **Cook Time:** 10 minutes | **Yield:** 12 sticks

INGREDIENTS

2 large eggs
½ cup whole milk
⅛ tsp. vanilla extract
1 tsp. plus ⅛ teaspoon cinnamon, divided
⅓ cup granulated sugar
4 slices Hawaiian thick-cut bread, such as Sara Lee® Artesano® Hawaiian Bakery Bread
2 Tbsp. vegetable oil, plus more as needed
Warm maple syrup for serving

DIRECTIONS

1. In a shallow bowl, whisk eggs, milk, vanilla and ⅛ teaspoon cinnamon.
2. Combine sugar and 1 teaspoon cinnamon in a plate and set aside.
3. Take the Hawaiian bread slices and cut the crusts off using a serrated knife. Cut each piece of crustless bread into 3 “sticks.”
4. Heat a 10-inch skillet over medium heat with the oil in the bottom of the skillet.
5. Coat each stick of bread in the egg mixture before placing in the skillet.
6. Repeat with 6 to 8 sticks at one time, separating the sticks by an inch in the pan to prevent crowding.
7. Gently use tongs to flip and rotate each stick as it cooks, ensuring that all sides are golden brown.
8. When thoroughly cooked, remove each stick and immediately roll it in the cinnamon sugar to coat.
9. Set aside while you finish cooking the remaining sticks. You may need to add a bit of additional oil to the pan in between batches.
10. Serve with warm maple syrup.

TIPS

These French Toast Sticks are amazing with other delicious toppings, such as:

- flavored syrups
- melted chocolate
- cream cheese icing
- caramel sauce

