



Build a buffet for color and taste variety

GIVING a holiday party can be challenging, especially when your best friend is on a special diet, your daughter's boyfriend is a vegetarian, and your brother and his friends won't be happy without red meat.

Question: How can you provide healthful foods and beverages that are enjoyed by everyone?

Answer: A self-serve buffet with a variety of foods gives the greatest flexibility. The variety increases the odds of having something for everyone. Serve bite-size portions so guests can try small amounts first and go back for more of what they like. And making traditional Christmas cookies in smaller sizes will allow sampling of those once-a-year treats without too many extra calories.

» Provide plenty of lower-calorie foods along with the usual fare. Use sliced fruits and vegetables to provide holiday color. In addition to the usual carrot and celery sticks, get

creative with a variety of the small, colorful mild peppers, baby corn and multiple types of olives. Add a dip for the vegetables to make a classy decorative platter.

For Christmas colors, mix a bowl of shelled green soy beans (edamame) with a touch of diced red pepper or quartered cherry tomatoes. Green olives with red pimento can give the holiday touch to a platter of sliced cheeses.

» To subtly keep meats on the light side, stick with grilled, broiled or sautéed items. Present them thinly sliced and add a marinade, sauce or salsa on the side for pizzazz. Leaner cuts of beef include flank and round steak; specific cuts of pork such as the loin can be very lean and some brands of pork roast now carry nutrition information. For cold cuts, try a brand such as Healthy Choice that specializes in lower-fat options.

» Fish also can be a good option. But stay away from

breaded and fried fish and avoid high-fat tartar and cream sauces.

» For vegetarian fare, add tofu and beans to salads or experiment with meat substitutes such as slices of veggie dogs and cheese served on cocktail-size bread.

» Make designated-driver drinks that are extra-special. Diet ginger ale can provide a great base for adding other beverages. Mix it with cranberry juice drink or other colorful options for a simple but pleasing punch bowl. Or, set up a self-service bar with ginger ale and a selection of tropical flavored beverages so people can create their own.

» Finally, provide plenty of strong paper plates and plastic wrap so guests can save you from too many leftovers.

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