

Potlucks Made Easy

Or how to source medieval-ish food from your local merchant

If you lack the time or the funds for making period dishes, you may resort to local merchants for quick purchases of suitable items as may appropriately grace a potluck picnic or shared feasting. Most of the items noted below are readily available from the larger markets, or can be supplemented with purchases from a real Farmers' Market or delicatessen.

Pack a nice platter — pottery, metal or wooden — on which to serve your offering. A handful of herbs or flowers (such as roses, violas, violets or pinks) from the garden can help dress such items. Include a serving implement, and/or a bowl or jug of suitable accompaniment to help make the modern look more medieval.

BREAD

Cob loaves, ciabatta, bagels, baps, flat bread, breadsticks.

Serve with plain, garlic or herbed butter, or butter flavoured with cinnamon, ginger or cloves or honey; hummus or a rough terrine.

If a sweet bread, serve with yoghurt drizzled with honey.

EGGS

Hard-boil, serve sprinkled with nutmeg.

SOUPS

Select ones with suitable ingredients (eg beef and vegetable, or chicken, not tomato).

Serve with bread. Or thicken with fresh breadcrumbs.

MEATS

Cooked chicken, pork, ham: squeeze lemon or orange juice over; sprinkle with chopped parsley or thyme; serve with quince paste or other fruit jelly.

Sliced roast lamb/beef: season with pepper; serve with chutney, pickles, Dijon mustard, quince paste.

Potted meats, terrines and pate: serve with bread.

Smoked fish, sardines, mussels, smoked oysters.

PIES

Quiche (avoid ones with tomato).

Meat pies.

Fruit: dust with cinnamon and sugar, serve with rosewater-flavoured cream.

VEGETABLES

Salad greens (spinach; cos or butter lettuce, not iceberg lettuce), cucumbers, radish: serve with vinaigrette; salted herbs: mint, parsley.

Radishes: serve with a small dish of salt.

Carrots: slice and sprinkle over lemon juice (bonus points for blue carrots!).

Spinach: steam lightly, toss with oil and pinenuts.

FRUIT

Oranges: slice and dust with cinnamon and sugar, sprinkle with rosewater.

Apples: slice and sprinkle with lemon juice.

Apricots: dried or fresh, sprinkled with pistachios.

Pears, quinces, peaches, grapes.

Cherries, strawberries, raspberries.

Figs, prunes, raisins, sultanas, currants — plump them up by soaking in juice or brandy.

Dates, olives.

CHEESES/DAIRY

Brie, camembert, emmenthal, feta, blue, cottage, ricotta, cream cheese.

Purchase round cheeses, rather than square cut.

Mix chopped herbs into cottage/cream cheese, or honey into ricotta.

Serve with dark bread (eg rye or pumpernickel), mustard, chutneys or pickles, sliced apple or pear (good with blue cheese).

Thick yoghurt: drizzle with honey, chopped dates, nuts.

NUTS

Walnuts, almonds, hazelnuts, chestnuts.

Raw, roasted, spiced, sugared.

BISCUITS

Shortbread, gingerbread, oatcakes, panforte.

Pick a home-baked look.

Serve with ricotta and honey, aged cheese, fruit jelly.

SWEETS

Turkish delight.

Candied ginger or orange peel.

Baked apples served with honey.

Marzipan: serve rolled out and cut into shapes.