



BY VIVIANE BAUQUET FARRE • PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEPHEN SCHMITT

BRUNCH

ladies who

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PLAN YOUR
PERFECT PARTY.
HERE'S HOW.

It's cold and grey. Holiday celebrations seem long forgotten, and New Year's resolutions are starting to lose their grip. Yes, February can be downright dreary. It's no surprise that this time of year, we're all in need of a pick-me-up. My secret? I entertain! Sure, I throw plenty of dinner parties, but I find the best way to warm up—and cheer up—in February is with Sunday brunch. Aside from indulging in mid-morning bellinis, a brunch sets the stage for a leisurely afternoon full of intimate conversation, hot coffee and cool cocktails, and wonderful food. On the following pages, you'll find some of my favorite Sunday morning entertaining tips—gems that promise to make your winter gathering so successful, you might just make it an annual thing.



A beautiful invitation sets the tone for a special event. Send yours about four weeks ahead.

INVITE ONLY

The guest list is perhaps the most important ingredient when planning your brunch. I recommend inviting six to eight people, no more. A small group helps keep things manageable in the kitchen, and also preserves the intimate warmth you want at the gathering. Choosing to invite very close friends—all who know each other well—is always a winning formula. Or, you might just put a group of your best girlfriends together, a sure way to have an afternoon filled with laughter and fun.



Hors d'oeuvres should wake up the appetite, not curb it. I start with nibbles, a dip, and "small bites," along with a festive mimosa or Bellini.

YOU'RE CASUALLY INVITED...

Since brunch is not a formal event, you could easily pick up the phone to invite friends. Even sending an email is perfectly acceptable. As for me, I prefer to send a beautiful card. Yes, it's old-fashioned, but it's also distinctive and sets the tone for a festive event. When sending an invite, keep these things in mind:

- Send your invite about four weeks ahead to give your friends plenty of time to arrange their schedules.
- Specify the time of the brunch. You want everyone to arrive more or less on time so you can keep things moving in the kitchen.
- Allow two weeks for RSVPs.

THE MENU

Just like as if you were throwing a dinner party, a brunch should consist of hors d'oeuvres, a main course, and dessert. Keep your hors d'oeuvre hour short—30 to 40 minutes is ample.

For the brunch itself, I choose to make a protein (in this case, a torta), a starch (potatoes with cured olives), and fresh greens. In the spirit of a casual affair, I arrange the dishes buffet style on a counter near the kitchen and let everyone help themselves.



Clementines are at their peak in February. They make the most delicious mimosas.



SUGGESTED MENU

Hors D'oeuvres

Sesame almonds & assorted cerignola olives
Grilled artichoke tapenade
Bite-sized cheddar and chives scones
Clementine mimosas

Brunch

Caramelized onion torta
with piquillo peppers and manchego
Pan-roasted baby yukon gold potatoes
with cured olives
Escarole hearts and avocado salad
(meyer lemon vinaigrette & toasted pine nuts)
Sourdough boule served
with rosemary-olive oil dip
Bruce Wayne, Pinot Noir,
Russian River Valley, CA 2006

Dessert

Pear-currant tea cake with pear cognac
Ginger mascarpone
Tea or coffee

To find these recipes and hands-on cooking demonstrations, go to foodandstyle.com.

TIPS FROM THE CHEF

- Cook recipes that are not too complicated.
- Make a few dishes that can be prepared ahead of time (it's hard to wake up at 6 a.m. on a Sunday morning to prepare a brunch!).
- Serve your entrees buffet style. This way, everybody can help themselves—and even come back for seconds.





AMBIENCE

Ideally, by attending your brunch, your friends will feel like they've been given an escape from their daily lives—and of course, from those frigid temperatures outside. Give your party an easygoing flow. Start hors d'oeuvres in a cozy sitting room, then move to the dining room for the brunch itself, and serve dessert in front of the fire. Spreading out like this will add to your guests enjoyment, and your own as well.

CANDLES

Tealights are perfect for a brunch. Light as many as you like.

- Group them in clusters of four and place them at opposite ends of the table, so everyone can see the flames.
- Place vases of fresh flowers in between them and you'll create a very dramatic centerpiece.

FLOWERS

Fresh bouquets are a wonderful way to cheer up your house.

- Pick (or buy) fresh flowers the day before your party.
- Choose cheerful colors. Yellows and oranges are perfect for February.
- Place a bouquet in each room of the house. Don't forget the bathroom.

MUSIC

Ease your guests into the day with light, upbeat tunes.

- Create a fabulous playlist on your iPod ahead of time.
- Keep the volume low—remember this is background music. You don't want to drown out the conversation.
- Jazz is a perfect mood setter.

VIVIANE BAUQUET FARRE

The founder of foodandstyle.com, Viviane Bauquet Farre shares recipes, cooking secrets, and entertaining tips in cooking classes run out of her Piermont home.