



Celebration in Your Back Pocket: A “Go-To” Holiday Menu that Won’t Break the Bank

Just because it’s dark on Wall Street doesn’t mean you can’t stoke the warm fires of friendship this holiday season. All it takes is a small amount of advance planning, the right ingredients, and your loved ones to host a priceless celebration. Here, David Mirassou, sixth-generation of America’s oldest winemaking family, and David Katz, a Napa Valley chef and Culinary Institute of America at Greystone wine and food expert, share some of the insight they’ve learned over decades of entertaining with great wine and food.

Go-To Buffet Menu

This special “go-to” menu is designed to make your holiday entertaining special but not break the bank. And it only sounds difficult – all menu items can be prepared in 30 minutes or less. Your friends and family will be impressed with the elegance of the food and wine pairings, as well as your savvy entertaining know-how.

Menu

Prosciutto with Grissini

Paired with Mirassou® Chardonnay or Pinot Noir

Figs with Chevre and Hazelnuts

Paired with Mirassou Pinot Noir or Chardonnay

Roquefort Mousse with Vegetables

Paired with Mirassou Pinot Noir or Chardonnay

Corn Bisque

Paired with Mirassou Chardonnay or

With Pinot Noir (with the addition of sautéed mushrooms, bacon or cheese)

Lemon-Garlic Shrimp

Paired with Mirassou Chardonnay

Veal (or Turkey) Polpettes (Meatballs)

Paired with Mirassou Pinot Noir or Chardonnay

Riesling-scented Pear Tartlets with Vanilla Cream

Paired with Mirassou Riesling

Preparing the Menu

Tip #1: Plan Ahead

Review the recipes and create your shopping list, making careful note of potential substitutions that can stretch your food budget. You may also want to review food ads to determine where you can get the best deals on these ingredients.

Tip #2: Get Organized

Break up the prep work over a three-day period to prepare this menu for 12 people. The total prep time is less than 1 hour per day for three days.

Many tasks can be accomplished simultaneously. For example, make the soup while the tart shells are baking. And, on the day of your celebration, warm the soup on the stove while the veal (or turkey) polpettes are in the oven.

Day 1	Make tart filling	20 minutes
	Make Corn Bisque	30 minutes
	Make Roquefort mousse	3 minutes
Day 2	Bake frozen tartlet shells	25 minutes
	Make and cook Veal Polpette	20 minutes
	Place frozen shrimp in fridge to thaw overnight	0 minutes
	Make shrimp marinade and refrigerate	5 minutes
	Make Dried Figs with Chevre and Toasted Hazelnuts	15 minutes
Day Of	Warm and serve Corn Bisque	10 minutes
	Warm and serve Veal Polpette	10 minutes
	Marinate, skewer and cook shrimp (total time)	15 minutes
	Cut vegetables and top with Roquefort Mousse	15 minutes
	Make and Serve Prosciutto Flags on Grissini	5 minutes
	Serve Dried Figs with Chevre and Toasted Hazelnuts	0 minutes
	Make whipped cream for Pear Tartlets	5 minutes
	Fill tart shells and top with whipped cream	5 minutes

Tip #3: Plan to offer your guests both a white and a red wine

You can't go wrong serving Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Mirassou® Chardonnay has wide appeal because it is light on the oak with more fruit-forward flavors to maximize food pairing options.

Pinot Noir is currently the trendiest and fastest growing wine on the market, but because of its soaring popularity, it can sometimes be difficult to select a premium quality bottle at a fair price. Mirassou was a pioneer in crafting Pinot Noir in America and is America's Favorite California Pinot Noir¹.

Tip #4: How much wine should you serve?

When allocating how many bottles of white versus red you should purchase, consider three things: the length of the event, the season of the year, and the tastes of your friends and family.

- For a cocktail event that will last 2-3 hours, figure 2-3 glasses per person to ensure you won't run out. This amount can be adjusted upwards for a lengthier, sit-down affair lasting 4+ hours.
- For a holiday celebration, plan for a 50-50 split between red and white wines. Summer entertaining calls for a slightly higher ratio of white to red, but even in the coldest winter months it's safest to plan on offering no higher than a 50-50 split of the two wine styles.
- However, the ultimate gauge should be the tastes of your loved ones. You know best whether they prefer red or white, so stock up accordingly.

Tip #5: Stretch your wine dollar

Now's the time to take advantage of price breaks for purchases of 6+ bottles at select supermarket chains. Several stores offer a 10 percent price break per bottle if you buy in larger quantities. For an event, the savings can really add up.

Tip #6: Stretching your food dollar – know where to splurge

Prosciutto Flags on Grissini:

Although pre-sliced, packaged prosciutto available in almost any supermarket tends to be lower quality than what's available from a specialty market, butcher or cheese shop. The savings are nominal over freshly sliced top-quality prosciutto.

Suggestion: SPLURGE

Dried Figs with Chevre and Toasted Hazelnuts:

Possible substitutions: Dried figs are not always available at a supermarket, but dried pitted dates, dried plums, dried apricots, dried pear segments and other fruit are excellent substitutions. Roasted pecans, walnuts, or cashews make a great substitution if you can't find hazelnuts. Fresh figs in season are excellent here.

In place of Chevre, the Roquefort Mousse recipe will work very well for this simple hors d'oeuvre, and using supermarket brand blue cheese will be less evident inside a sweet fig. If you want to simplify, make the Roquefort Mousse for both and save both time and money by purchasing only one specialty cheese.

Suggestion: YOU DECIDE

Roquefort Mousse with Fresh or Blanched Vegetables:

There are two basic price options here:

- Purchase top-quality Roquefort from a specialty market or cheese shop with Italian Mascarpone for a splurge.
- Purchase a supermarket brand Roquefort or other blue cheese with cream cheese.

Either option produces a great result, but there is very little mousse per two-bite canapé here, so turning a great quality cheese into a mousse is already a simple way to stretch the value of a higher-cost ingredient.

Suggestion: YOU DECIDE

Lemon & Garlic Shrimp:

This is a “splurge” item, but a great way to celebrate the flavor of Mirassou® Chardonnay.

Two Options:

- IQF or “individually quick frozen” shrimp with both shell and vein already removed are now readily available at most supermarkets. Because the shrimp are separate in the bag, consumers can thaw only what they need in just a few hours in the refrigerator and keep the rest in the freezer for another use. Most uncooked shrimp at any fish counter are previously frozen, so the IQF is a great option.
- For a splurge, some specialty markets and fish markets carry truly fresh, never-frozen shrimp, which are superior in texture and flavor to frozen. Fresh shrimp should be kept very cold (on ice in the refrigerator), and used quickly after purchase to assure excellent texture and flavor.

Suggestion: SAVE by using individually quick frozen (IQF) shrimp

Veal (or turkey) Polpette (meatballs) on Rosemary Tips:

While veal always seems to equal high cost and elegance in the minds of consumers, ground veal is widely available in supermarkets due to its use in many meatloaf recipes.

If veal is not available, freshly ground beef, pork, or turkey could also be used to produce great results. The veal is hearty enough for Pinot Noir, and delicate enough to pair well with Chardonnay.

Suggestion: YOU DECIDE

Corn Bisque in Demitasse Cups:

This recipe has very few ingredients and a simple cooking method. It refrigerates well for several days, and freezes well for several months. It is also one of the few recipes where a high quality frozen corn makes an acceptable substitution for fresh sweet corn.

Blending this soup to a smooth purée and serving it either in demitasse (espresso) cups or other small cups gives the soup elegance without high cost.

Suggestion: SAVE by using frozen, sweet corn

Riesling-Scented Pear Tartlets with Vanilla Cream:

This is the most labor-intensive of the dishes, so if you're trying to save time, purchase the premade frozen puff pastry tart shells, which are available in almost any freezer section.

Any good baking apple such as Granny Smith or Golden Delicious could be substituted as a lower-cost and easier-to-find alternative to pears.

Suggestion: SPLURGE on the premade frozen puff pastry tart shells; SAVE by using fruit that's in-season or on sale.

Tip #7: Tabletop Considerations

Glassware: At a buffet cocktail event, there's no need for separate red and white wine glasses. Most club stores sell all-purpose wine glasses with a bowl shape that's in between a specialized white and red style. And, in a pinch, serve wine in clear plastic tumblers.

Plates and Utensils: Many people use disposable plates and utensils for holiday celebrations, and these can be both festive and convenient. These days, it seems, everyone is more inclined to "go green" and forgo paper products. If you're in this latter category, you have options:

- If the tone of your celebration is casual, use the plates and utensils you own, even if they are slightly mismatched.
- If you own holiday-themed plates, use these! If you don't have enough, see about augmenting what you have by borrowing a set from someone you know.
- Rent plates and utensils – this is not as expensive as you might think – and there's no washing involved, which is a time-saver.

Linens: Many people have a treasure trove of unused holiday linens – either their own, or that of a family member or friend. Freshen the look of your table by going through your linen closet or borrowing from someone you know.

If you don't own tablecloths or napkins, it's easy to make your own, no-sew versions. Simply measure your table and head to the fabric store for a length of cloth and some fabric glue. During the holidays, holiday-themed fabric is often on sale, or choose a remnant that's been marked down and fits your budget.

Centerpieces, etc.: Centerpieces and other table dressing don't have to cost a fortune. Here are some ideas:

- Fill a bowl with one of the following: pine cones; holiday ornaments; or one type of fruit (pomegranates, lemons, oranges, limes, etc.)

- Fill a plate with varying heights of candles and place evergreen sprigs around the edges.
- Purchase a potted flowering plant that's in-season and place it in a pretty planter or bowl; plant it later in your landscape.
- Snip flowers from your garden – whatever's in season – and let them float in a shallow bowl of water.
- Purchase and display an herb tree, such as rosemary, and plant it in your garden later.

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