

# How to Give Buffet Suppers

By Emily Post

*(The following is excerpted from a 1933 pamphlet published by the Chase Brass and Copper Company and distributed with many of its "Small Electrics.")*

The present enthusiasm for every variety of buffet party would seem to be at least one happy result of the depression, which in shortening the purses of all of us has brought appreciation of the simpler hospitalities. But whatever the cause, it is certainly true that among the nicest parties possible to give, the buffet luncheon, dinner or supper is far and away the most popular and smart. Moreover, its popularity is as typical of the great houses and the last word in penthouse apartments as it is of the simplest cottage, whose owner has to be cook and waitress as well as hostess—in short, three persons in one. For Mrs. 3-in-1 the buffet table is ideal, since it makes the inviting of twenty or thirty easily practicable when a sit-down dinner or lunch party at the dining table would be limited to eight, or perhaps as few as six! Moreover, lack of service is not a handicap, and the menu can be of the simplest and the least expensive, since the great appeal of a buffet party is its friendly informality. On the other hand, a buffet table differently set is equally suitable on occasions that are to the highest degree formal.

At the informal end of the scale, a picnic is the most unceremonious buffet possible. From this point of simplicity, buffet parties range in a gradually ascending scale through cocktail parties, everyday afternoon teas, stand-up breakfasts, luncheons, dinners and suppers, to the collation of the most formal official or diplomatic reception, or of an elaborate wedding or ball. In short, every type of party, whether it includess half a dozen friends or half a thousand guests, is served either completely or at least partially from a buffet.

As I have already said, the depression was no doubt responsible for the buffet-supper craze, but now that its popularity is in full swing, it would seem safe to predict that even though the New Deal brings prosperity back, buffet parties are too thoroughly in accord with the spirit of the present day to go out of fashion. They are far more likely to be further glorified than to give way to returning formality.

*(Continued on page 2)*

*(Continued from page 1)*

The generation of today—and its influence upon tomorrow—turns thumbs down upon the whole formal dinner picture. Today's younger hostesses find no allure in a vast expanse of white damask on a table set with sparse magnificence, with places for twenty-four or more, a footman behind every third chair, the company walking in two by two at the dining-room door the butler with table list in his hand saying, "At the right, sir" or "At the left, sir" to each approaching gentleman.

Of course, it is quite possible that formality to at least a certain degree will be found essential as a background for the 1890 clothes that Paris is at this minute trying to launch. But it is not easy to believe that we shall soon again see footmen in knee britches and powdered hair, and that all the men of the smart world shall appear in tail coats every evening in the week, and that they and their dinner partners shall again become apparently unaware of each other's first names. At all events, the buffet party is the favorite one of the hour, and that being the case, let us consider the giving of one in detail:

For our typical example, let us choose that most popular one—the buffet supper:

Since every buffet party is at its best when people know one another well, it is essential that you confine your invitations to people in one group, or else that you ask a reasonable number from each different group, so that none can find themselves marooned without plenty of friends to sit with. Invitation is usually written across the top of the face side of your visiting card. For an evening party or a Sunday lunch at which your husband will be present, you write the invitation on your "Mr. and Mrs." card. Or if you have no double cards, you would write "Mr." in front of the "Mrs." on your own card. If you think it simpler to telephone the invitation, this would be equally proper.

Having completed your list of guests, you next decide upon your menu. One of the great advantages of a buffet is that you can choose whichever dishes are most practical for your own kitchen to prepare. The chances are that you have certain favorite recipes, that you have acquired or inherited, or perhaps developed, and these are the very ones that should be put at the head of your list. It does not really matter which dishes you happen to choose so long as they are good of their kind. Otherwise, the directions are merely those of common sense. Don't feed hungry men on bouillon, sar-

*(Continued on page 3)*

*(Continued from page 2)*

dines, samples of fruit salad and meringues. For women alone, food can perhaps be trifling, but if men with normally good appetites are coming to supper, then be sure to give them two or three dishes that are substantial. One of these, or better, two, should be hot.

Substantial dishes, for example, include all thick soups, meat, vegetables and puddings. Nearly everything made in a baking dish is substantial, and so is pie. Olives, radishes and celery are nothing but trimmings. Olives or other relishes are typically served with cocktails before dinner in the living room. I add this because hundreds of hostesses apparently believe that an olive is the emblem of a dinner party. Have them of course if you like, but do not count them when deciding on food.

I should like to point out that the menu of every buffet meal should include spaghetti or scalloped, either white or sweet, potatoes, or a corn pudding, or any other hot and very sustaining starch vegetable. Buttered rolls, party sandwiches, a fruit cup and coffee, and perhaps hot chocolate, should be included with each menu. Every dish at a buffet without set tables must be chosen to eat easily with a fork held in one hand while holding the plate in the other. If you are having set tables so that knives as well as forks are practical, then the menu can include roasts either hot or cold and any other knife and fork foods. And now let us consider setting the table.

On the day of the party a table is placed wherever you think best. If your dining room is a big one, the table is left in the center of the room. If the room is small, the table is perhaps pushed flat against one wall and the chairs are taken out of the room and put about wherever there is most space. Or perhaps you choose a table in your living room or out of doors. One of the advantages of a buffet table is that it can be set with anything you have. No stack of plates need match any other stack, each fork or spoon need only match the others of its own row, and never mind about the other rows elsewhere. Or if you have a complete equipment that does not match, then that is so much better. The only thing that really matters is that the table be inviting to appetite.

The ideal formal dinner table of yesterday was invariably white, lighted by mainly softly shaded candles. Color was confined to that of the roses, with candle shades and iced cakes to match. The ideal formal dinner table, remember, was in harmony with ritualistic calm, its appeal was to the mathematical sense of balance, and the enjoyment of food was epicurean. The modern buffet supper table, on the other hand, can hardly have color or

*(Continued on page 4)*

*(Continued from page 3)*

light too bright, since its object is to fill the senses with the gaiety of color, stimulate conviviality and whet the appetite.

In a house of definite period, the table covering is in keeping with the house, linen, damask, either white or of a very pale tint, in a French or Georgian one; or ...in all modernistic types of rooms, the table is left bare. Actually there is no rule except that fineness or coarseness or bareness should be in accord with the table's appointments and surroundings. As in every table setting, all objects must be geometrically balanced, and in scale with each other. These requirements are essential.

One difference in the principle of buffet and ordinary table setting is that objects of utility are of first importance, and unless there be ample space for both, objects that are solely for ornament are omitted. Flowers in the center of the table are lovely of course, but if it is a question of choosing between flowers and fruit, a centerpiece of fruit is preferable. In the same way if the table be crowded and candles are not needed to see by, they would better be left off. If candles are needed, candelabra are better than candlesticks for two reasons: first, they give better light; they contribute height, which is important because a buffet is always more heavily laden than the ordinary table and therefore looks best when lights are many, and dominantly high.

In setting a buffet table the important dishes of food are placed down the length of the table as close to the centerpiece as possible. The two most important items of equipment are placed precisely in the center of each end. A large tea and coffee set on its tray or a soup tureen or other container of size, at one end, is balanced by platters of hot food at the other. If the table is of sufficient size, a punch bowl or a beer keg is put at the end opposite the tea and coffee service, and the platters or chafing dishes of hot foods are put in the center of one side of the table, and cold dishes on the other.

When the invitation to a buffet supper reads "from seven o'clock," it means that supper will begin at seven and continue for an hour or so. Those who are casual about promptness like this plan, since it gives them plenty of leeway. It also allows others to linger over cocktails or others again to sit outdoors to admire the sunset or the moon-rise.

For this continuous type of buffet service, the various thermos or dry ice or electric equipments for keeping cold or hot cannot be overlooked. Longest of all we have known the hot-water urn and chafing dish, each with a lamp

*(Continued on page 5)*

*(Continued from page 4)*

under it, and we also have long become dependent on thermos bottles and jars, but there is now a very last word in buffet equipment—the debutante daughter as it were, of the chef's bain-marie, or a four-compartment chafing dish. Its designer has called it a "buffet server." But no matter what it is called, it is quite the most delectable novelty that has been produced; to me at least, it is completely tempting. Its design is modernistic, as is suitable in the polished chromium of which it is made, and yet its simplicity of design that relies for its ornamentation on octagon outline and ivory edging and ebony handles, would be entirely in key with almost every type of house. It holds four deep casserole dishes, two large and two small, set into a smart tray-shaped box filled with water kept by an electric element at an exact temperature. No metal, it seems to me, is quite so complete an answer to the housewife's prayer as chromium—appealing not only to the eye, but to practical requirements, because unless subjected to gas or to the greasy smoke from a frying pan, it stays brilliantly polished to the end of time. Another beauty of chromium to most of us is that really lovely things can be had at comparatively small expense.



This table for a Buffet Lunch was arranged by Emily Post in her home in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. Featured in the foreground is the Chase "Buffet Server".

Color plays an enormous part in the beauty of a modern buffet table. If you have copper bowls or dishes or a samovar or a copper-bound beer keg, red-checked peaches, apples, pears, purple grapes, bananas and oranges, even a few tomatoes to add to the coppery red if you live far from the home waters of lobster and cannot include the ubiquitous platter of lobster decorated with its claws! With copper keep all of the autumn tints in mind: green, red, russet and yellow on a bare table. Or if you prefer, a red or green or yellow tablecloth will make a warm and inviting combination. Coarse white damask tablecloth and napkins dyed a fairly strong color make an ideal foundation for a table that you prefer not to leave bare. Very smart colors at the moment are eggplant, russet brown, lobster red, leaf green, dark blue, or if you are setting your table with chromium, additional colors to choose from

*(Continued on page 6)*

*(Continued from page 5)*

include turquoise blue, emerald green and magenta.

In a modernistic house on a table set with chromium, you may prefer to go the smartest of colorless extremes, and have every item either black or white or silver; black glass table top, black and white napkins, black and white or silver luster china, black or white glass, or else everything in brilliant chromium...

But let us return to our particular supper. At the hour set, the guests begin to arrive. The host and hostess greet them and perhaps introduce any who may find themselves for the moment alone. It must of course always be remembered that at every small party, the roof of a friend's house serves as an introduction, and one talks with whomever one may find oneself next to.

When the majority of those expected have arrived, the doors into the dining room are opened, and people, in more or less of a queue, file around the dining table and the women as well as the men help themselves. Or perhaps, as at a dance, the men fill plates and bring them to their partners. This is what they are supposed to do. If they don't then you have to direct them as you would direct children at a party by saying, "Please go into the dining room and help yourself to what you like." Then if they stand blockading the table, you have to say, "Won't you please take your plate and go in the other room again and sit down?"

If there are no little tables and guests must put their glasses on the floor (there being no other place), it is rather better to have the iced drink in goblets, which are raised on high but substantial stems, because they are easier to reach than in low tumblers which sit flat on the floor. The cup, saucer and spoon necessary for the coffee, tea, or chocolate must be managed as best one can!

At the house of Mrs. 3-in-1 the guests must, of course, help themselves to everything to eat, or to drink. This means that everyone makes two or perhaps three trips to the dining room—first for the main course or two, and later for the dessert. ... If people are not sitting beside those they like, women as well as men are free to move elsewhere. An attractive woman can even escape a tiresome talker by going to the table and then joining whomever she chooses.

The buffet table of the moment, glowing with color and enticing come-hither, is the perfect expression of friendly hospitality, ideally in keeping with the spirit of the times.