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EVOO's Tips for Planning a Great Party

Theme your gathering. Build a party theme that has a specialty cocktail, a decor scheme, and a menu that creatively tie the event together. Magazines and blogs are great sources for party-planning inspiration.

No new recipes! Try to choose recipes you've made before and are comfortable with, so your final preparation is stress free.

Keep the party a manageable size. Big buffet and cocktail parties can be fun, but Emery and Neroni suggest just six people around a dining table—a perfect number for great conversation and easy serving.

Simplify the bar by serving all beverages in the same glassware. A stemmed multipurpose glass with a 10- to 12-ounce capacity gives your table a unified look and is good for wine, water, beer, and even a special mixed drink that may tie in with the theme of your party.

Have a plan when friends ask, "What can I do to help?" Figure out which tasks you can safely give away and allow your guests to chip in. Buy inexpensive white aprons at a restaurant supply house. Then, add your guest chefs' names in colorful waterproof markers—they can take their aprons home as keepsakes.

Entertaining at Home with Ease

JUST FOLLOW FRENCH COOKING TRADITION: GET EVERYTHING IN PLACE, AND THE REST WILL BE SIMPLE AND FUN

Written by Robyn Roehm Cannon

For Pacific Northwest chefs Lenore Emery and Bob Neroni, every day is a party. At least that's what it feels like around the counter in the exhibition kitchen at their Cannon Beach, Oregon, cooking school called EVOO—short for extra-virgin olive oil.

This talented and energetic husband-and-wife duo have spent their professional lives cooking in luxury hotels, planning and executing high-end corporate events, and teaching others in the culinary world. But early in 2000, they traded in their respective careers, moved to Oregon's most famous beach town, and today they bring residents and tourists together to share techniques for preparing sustainable, seasonal, and local ingredients in a creative dinner party setting nearly every night of the week.

Recently, I was a guest at one of their Farmers Market Dinners, held Tuesday evenings during the Cannon Beach Farmers Market season, from late spring through autumn. An ever-changing menu utilizes the freshest artisan-grown ingredients that Chef Bob brings back from the market that morning.

Eighteen guests gathered in the kitchen at 6 PM, and, as soon as everyone had a glass of wine in hand, the lively dinner preparation began. The chefs quickly transformed organic pork into juicy fennel-crusted loin garnished with early spring garlic, fresh fava beans, and wildly colored rainbow chard. Then came a salad composed of English rose petals, tiny grilled cipollini, mildly bitter arugula, and tender baby lettuces—delicious!

We learned the secret to perfect, fluffy Dungeness crab fried rice, flavored with sesame oil and bright green English peas that were so sweet they burst in the mouth like candy. Every day, Chef Bob bakes Daily Bread—and a slice of his sesame-crusted hand-formed loaf, liberally spread with house-churned sweet cream chive butter, was worth every calorie. A dessert finale of orange-scented scones topped with tiny local strawberries and crème fraîche and garnished with a drizzle of fresh basil oil was so memorable that I can still taste the unique combination.

Each dish was prepared with components that had been prepped earlier in the day and came together in what seemed like a snap. From my front-and-center seat, the festive presentation of this seasonal feast was seamless.

My experience at EVOO caused me to reflect upon my own entertaining efforts. Although I'm an enthusiastic cook and put nice meals on the table, my process can be exhausting. Sometimes, by the time dinner is served, my guests are looking at their watches—and I'm ready for bed!

What could I learn from these experienced cooks that would make my parties easier, time efficient, and more fun to execute?

Neroni and Emery's most important step for success is based on a French cooking term that's common practice for professional chefs: *mise en place* (pronounced mee-zahn plah.) It literally translates as "everything in place," and refers to the organization of the kitchen, from equipment to ingredients, including all the steps it takes to complete a dish and put it on the table.

"*Mise en place* provides the way to enjoy being a guest at your own event," says Neroni. "It really boils down to anticipating the needs of a recipe from beginning to end, and maintaining order in your kitchen by making lists and determining which of those steps can be completed in advance."

Mise en place extends to your home as well. Begin party preparation several days before the event, Emery advises. Make sure your table linens are ironed, the house is cleaned, glassware is sparkling, and serving platters are ready for your table. "You'll then have time to arrange fresh flowers and fuss over small details that are time-consuming but will make the party a unique expression of your personality," she says.





"A successful party is all about making people feel special," agrees Neroni. "If you're relaxed and having fun, I guarantee that your guests will have a great time. They may come in as strangers, but they'll leave as friends." ■



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