

# SUSTAINABLE DINNER PARTY: THEME IDEAS

There are essentially two types of dinner parties — the one where you get culinary help from your friends and family (a potluck), and the one where you plan, shop, clean, prepare, cook, serve, and host — all by yourself or with a partner.

Answer these basic questions before you dive in and plan accordingly:

- **How much time do you have?** If you are cooking for guests after work, don't get too elaborate; you want to sit down and enjoy the meal too.
- **How much money do you want to spend?** Budgets are tight these days; make a plan and stick with it. If you need to lighten your load, ask your guests to bring a bottle of wine or dessert — that's acceptable even if it's not a potluck.
- **How much space do you have?** Be realistic: you want your guests to be comfortable! If you would like to have a sit down dinner, how many place settings can you easily get around your table?
- **Do you have vegetarians, vegans, or people with food allergies coming?** Ask your guests if they have any dietary restrictions before you start planning so that everyone can share in the feast.

## POTLUCK PARTY

Get your guests involved in the whole process. Share the handouts in the Sustainable Dinner Party series with them. Ask them to shop at a farmers' market and have them report back on how it goes. If you can, meet at the market and shop together, maybe even cook together. Encourage them to talk to the farmer they buy from. What growing practices do they employ? Where are they located? Then around the table, have your guests tell their stories about the food they bought and prepared.

## DO IT YOURSELF

Incorporate your sustainable passions and share them! If you have a CSA share, cook from it and tell your guests

about the experience of being a CSA member. If you shop at a farmers' market, pick up fresh seasonal items, cook your favorite recipes and exchange stories with your guests about the food. Talk about what it means to consume locally sourced food in your region. For example, if you live in the northeast, mangos simply aren't local and tomatoes aren't in season in December. It will connect you to your food and hopefully inspire your guests to try sustainable eating on their own.

## THEME IDEAS

### Dinner and a Movie:

Keeping with the sustainable theme, watch a movie such as *The Real Dirt on Farmer John*, an entertaining film about a farmer who converts to Community Supported Agriculture to keep his farm up and running. Finger foods or a buffet style meal would work well with a movie: grab your plates, fill them up and gather around the TV for some enlightening fun. Don't forget to make organic popcorn to complete the movie experience.

### Farmers' Market Party:

First you're going to need a nearby farmers' market. You can find one through [www.eatwellguide.org](http://www.eatwellguide.org). The object is to have as many party provisions as possible come from the market. If you like to plan ahead, go the week before your party, see what is available, and give it some thought. If you are feeling spontaneous, just go and buy what looks good and incorporate it into the meal. Look for cheese, wine, bread, and other goodies at the market too. You may want to use farmers' market finds such as flowers, winter squash, and fruit as table decorations.

### International Party:

Pick a country and get into its spirit, sustainably of course. Let's use Italy as an example: pull out your favorite regional Italian cookbook (or surf the web for Italian recipes) and build an Italian meal. Start with an antipasto that includes fresh vegetables, locally produced cheeses, and cured

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# SUSTAINABLE DINNER PARTY: THEME IDEAS (CONT.)

meats — all from the farmers' market. Drink Italian wine, play Italian music, and *buon appetito!* Try some new recipes and introduce your guests to new flavors. A red and white checkered table cloth and some candles dripping on Chianti bottles will complete the atmosphere.

## **Build-Your-Own Taco/Burrito/Pizza Bar:**

This theme gets everyone involved in the kitchen. Have the shells/tortillas/crusts ready and provide lots of delicious toppings to go with them. Set out plenty of traditional in-season ingredients to use for fillings/toppings, but offer some unusual ones too! Are peaches in season? Make peach salsa for your tacos and burritos or slice them up for a peach-goat cheese-basil pizza topping. Get your cheese from a local dairy and if tomatoes are in season, fresh salsa or tomato sauce can't be beat.

## **Cookbook Party:**

Do you have a pile of cookbooks that you haven't tried, or has your favorite cookbook been neglected? Choose the most seasonally appropriate one and create the whole meal from it. Pick your favorite recipes and head down to the farmers' market. For a potluck, select recipes for different courses and distribute them to your guests. Be sure to ask about their level of comfort in the kitchen and give them lots of options.

## **Iron Chef Challenge:**

*Allez cuisine!* The object of the game is to make a tasty, sustainable dinner using special theme ingredients that you select. If it's a potluck, assign each guest an ingredient beforehand and have them bring their best creation. For a regular dinner party, pair up your guests with a theme ingredient for each course (entrée, side, dessert, etc.) and

have them collaborate in your kitchen. See whose cuisine will reign supreme!

## **Vegetarian Party:**

This one can be especially interesting if you aren't a vegetarian! It's good to get out of your comfort zone and experiment. Going meatless, even for just one day a week, is gaining in popularity because of its positive effects on individuals' health and the health of the planet. You can start with a favorite non-vegetarian recipe and adapt it, or use a recipe that doesn't rely on meat. If you aren't one for improvisation and you don't have a vegetarian cookbook, you can find lots of good vegetarian recipes at [www.meatlessmonday.org](http://www.meatlessmonday.org).

## **Holiday Party:**

Pick a holiday, any holiday — Halloween, the Fourth of July, St. Patrick's Day, Bastille Day. Every holiday has traditions and trappings that you can tap into. Be creative and look at them with an eye toward sustainability. Make sure the food is seasonal, and check out the farmers' market for decorating ideas. Like the International Party, surround yourselves with the theme: the food, the décor, and even the music should reflect the holiday. You could even ask your guests to dress up!

## **Comfort Foods Party:**

Make the dishes with sustainable ingredients and challenge yourself and your guests to make healthier versions of their favorite comfort foods. Meatloaf with grass-fed beef, macaroni and cheese with farmstead cheeses, free-range chicken soup, green bean casserole with fresh local green beans, mushrooms, and milk — you can even make your own crispy onions — the possibilities are endless!

To learn more about sustainable local food, visit Sustainable Table at [www.sustainabletable.org](http://www.sustainabletable.org)

