

Happy Hour At Home

Hors d'oeuvres for dinner ... hooray! Happy Hour doesn't have to take place in a bar, finger-wrestling with co-workers for the last Swedish meatball with three TV screens blaring ESPN. Bring the tradition home and extend it through the dinner hour. Stock the pantry with ingredients for an evening of games and little bites of deliciousness, and keep it simple enough to throw together on a weeknight.

THINGS YOU'LL NEED:

Menu Ingredients
Drinks Ingredients
Games
Music

Happy hour is more about camaraderie than scoring cheap booze and free snacks, so invite the crew; co-workers, neighbors (or just cocoon with your closest) to make happy times for an hour (or more). This is a low-maintenance gig where a few iconic snacks and pub games will bring the experience home.

Games:

The strategy is to feature games that aren't too heady.

You want guests to joke and visit while playing around.

Think pub style; Darts (video and unweaponized versions are great alternatives to original).

Billiards ask a friend to bring their tabletop version, or queue up the Wii edition.

Trivia and Nerf basketball round out the curriculum.

Drinks:

Beer tasting all the way!

Keep wine and something clear (gin or vodka) with soda, tonic on hand to cover your bases.

Food:

Sure, you could totally get away with the boring old pizza delivery, packaged chips, buckets of dips and bowls of nuts but it doesn't take much more effort to up the spread to snacks that are healthy enough to pass for dinner. Try not to make too much of a fuss or you'll shy away from making it a tradition.



Guest Love To Customize Their Nibbles.

Also, a do-it-yourself snack bar makes it easier for you. Whip together a snack buffet, and guests will belly up to make a creation. Pick one that you can easily pull off, then complete the buffet with simpler snacks.



Bruschetta Bar: toasted breads brushed with olive oil (olive, baguette, French country), roasted garlic, chopped tomato and basil, white bean puree, fancy tuna, lemon artichoke spread, olive tapenade, roasted peppers, fresh mozzarella.

Mini-Burger Bar: chicken, turkey, beef and falafel patties served on dinner rolls with a ka-jillion topping options. Cheeses: blue, brie, cheddar and goat. Add condiments, plus, caramelized onions, sun-dried tomatoes avocado, pickles, aioli, mustards, ketchup, etc.



Taco Bar: assorted tortillas; spinach, tomato, multi-grain and corn. Cheese: spicy jack, cheddar, queso fresco, and Cotija. Diced chicken and shrimp, fresh chopped tomato, black olives, bell peppers, mild green chilies and mushrooms.

Finish off the buffet by tweaking some old-school favorites: herbed nuts, salt and vinegar potato chips, doctored canned soup served in little cups, curly fries served in newspaper cones and chopped salad.

For step-by-step instructions for each menu item, Google the key words of the recipes you'd like to feature. Keep the ingredients stashed in your pantry, freezer and fridge, depending on their shelf life, until you're in the mood!