

Beating the Blues With Homegrown Hospitality

Last week I invited my young neighbors, Becca and Sam, and their two little girls to supper. I prepared lasagna and salad, and Becca and Sam brought wine and freshly baked bread. After supper, the girls entertained themselves with the Lincoln Logs and Play-Mobile sets I keep handy for my grandchildren, and we adults passed the time discussing politics, books, and children.

It was a fine evening.

For the 10 years I lived in Asheville, North Carolina, where I taught seminars in literature, history, and Latin to homeschooling students, one of my pleasures was inviting some of my students' parents to supper parties. Six or seven couples would arrive at my two-bedroom apartment, all of them bringing food and drink to add to my quiche or chicken soup. Lots of talk and laughter, stories and jokes, delicious food and good wine. Those evenings deepened friendships, took us away from our daily routines, and at least in my case, bestowed a sense of renewal, a refreshment of the heart and mind.

For a year now, government mandates in many states have limited such social events. We've worn masks in public, communicated with friends and family via Zoom or Skype, and chafed under lockdowns and stay at home orders. Whether these measures helped prevent deaths from COVID-19 is still up for debate, but few of us would deny that these restrictions have limited many of our relationships.

But now spring has arrived with its warmer weather, its soft, long, and lovely twilights, and the opportunity to spend more time outdoors. It's the perfect season for a restoration of

hospitality, to play host to family, friends, and neighbors.

Hospitality derives from the Latin *hospes*, which means, interestingly, both “host” and “guest.” From *hospes* we also get our word “hospital,” and if we think about it, we see that the practice of hospitality actually places us in a sort of hospital, a place of recovery where we can restore our souls and become well again.

To offer that hospitality is a simple thing, but one with great rewards.

Table settings, background music, and justifications for serving dessert are just a few of the great hosting tips [offered](#) at *BonAppatour.com*. Mostly, the author of this piece encourages us to relax, to be ourselves, and to keep a gathering or a dinner party as simple as possible.

I couldn't agree more. Some of my acquaintances dislike inviting friends to supper because they are ashamed of their culinary skills, but we needn't be master chefs to invite people into our homes for a meal. On another occasion when I invited Becca and Sam to share a supper with me, I did so knowing the oven in my house was broken. Instead of baking lasagna, quiche, or some other such dish, I made a simple chicken soup and served it up with a squad of hearty hors d'oeuvres: brie and crackers, grapes and strawberries, shrimp, bread, tortilla chips, and salsa. We can have fun and deepen our relationships with others just as surely over a shared bottle of wine, cheese, and crackers as we can with the most elaborate of meals.

If you're on a limited budget, as I sometimes have been, prepare food that doesn't cost you a fortune at the grocery store. Several times I've made 21-bean soup for a crowd, added bread and crackers, and served up yogurt pies, making for an inexpensive and easy meal. I'm no French chef, but I'm always up for some good conversation and a break from my routine, and

evenings like these provide such opportunities in spades.

Most of all, we can avoid stress when planning a special get-together if we remember that the main point of such an evening is not the food, but the companionship. Like “hospitality,” companionship also has its roots in Latin. *Cum* for the ancient Romans meant “with,” and *panis* was their word for bread. A companion, then, is someone with whom we break bread. It’s less about the food than it is about the company.

After this long, dark winter, it’s time for some light, some laughter, and some real-time communication with others. Whether it’s a backyard cookout with hamburgers and beer, a more formal meal around the dining room table, or a glass of wine with friends on the back deck, it’s time to take off the masks, make up for lost months stuck in separation, and get some face-to-face contact going with our friends and neighbors.

It’s time, in short, to throw some parties.

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