

## HOW TO START A COOKING CLUB

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Cooking clubs are growing in popularity and it's easy to see why. They are not only a wonderful way to spiff up or share cooking skills, but they also feed emotional well-being by providing an opportunity to socialize. If you are new to an area and are looking for ways to meet new people, starting a cooking club can be a great way to connect and build relationships. It's also a fun way for established friends or family members to gather on a regular basis.

## BENEFITS OF CREATING A COOKING CLUB

There are many benefits of being a part of a cooking club, including opportunities to:

- cook and taste new cuisines or ingredients, or try new cooking techniques
- learn from others in the group about their culture, cooking experiences, successes and not-so-successes
- explore cookbooks, online recipe sources, other members' favorite recipes
- share the cost and labor of a cooking a full meal
- gather socially on a regular basis with friends and/or family, or meet others and build new relationships

There are no real hard and fast rules for operating a cooking club, as the creator and members can determine the type and theme. To help get things started, let's go over a few steps that will be helpful when forming a cooking club.



## HOW TO GET STARTED

### 1. INVITE MEMBERS

Who should you ask? Consider those who have similar tastes, or desires when it comes to cooking. One of the easiest ways to begin is by talking with friends or family members who enjoy cooking or are interested in learning. Invite those who you feel will be committed participants. To increase the group size, a friend and family member may know of someone who would also be interested in joining and be a good fit for the group.

If you are new to an area and wish to build new relationships, reaching out to others from your apartment or condo complex, neighborhood, school or organization, workplace, or other setting can be a great way to start. Online communities and social media can also be a source for forming membership, but proceed with caution.

Inquire about the size of potential members' kitchens, dining areas, or community party rooms, and limit the membership to a manageable number. Starting with 3 - 5 participants is a comfortable size. Groups can grow quickly and become challenging to organize, so consider limiting the membership to no more than 8 participants.

## 2. SELECT THE DATE, TIME, AND FREQUENCY

Draft an email to those interested in membership to inquire about days of the week, time, and frequency preferences. Many cooking clubs meet bi-weekly, monthly or bi-monthly.

For the first event, choose a date and time that works for everyone and provide a calendar invite.

## 3. DETERMINE THE HOSTING ROTATION

Once the date, time, and frequency are set, a calendar can be created for the year which helps everyone with planning. Decide on what works best for the hosting rotation - either by assigning meeting dates to participants or by providing a sign-up sheet. It is common for the group creator to host the first event, although that is not carved in stone!



## 4. SET A THEME

Gather input from members about an overarching theme for cooking that takes place each month. This will also help with where your recipes are sourced. The options are endless, and here are some ideas to get your thoughts going.

- Will the group decide to cook **one new type of cuisine** each month, or focus on one type for the entire year?
- Will the theme be around **a specific way of eating** such as gluten-free, Vegan, Vegetarian, Pescatarian, Mediterranean diet, heart-healthy, low-sodium, sustainable, zero waste, etc.? Or, is the group open to all types of foods and ways of eating?
- Would you like to **explore cookbooks**, choosing one for the year, or a different one each meeting?
- How about **exploring online cooking resources** such as NYTimes Cooking, Washington Post or Wall Street Journal Recipes, food blogs and newsletters, Food52, Cooks Illustrated, the Kitchn, etc.?
- Will the focus be on using **seasonal ingredients**?
- Or how about selecting a **cooking skill level** (beginning, intermediate, advanced)?
- Would you like to do **batch cooking or meal prep**, completing all of the prep and cooking together at host location?
- Maybe each meeting features **member's favorite recipes**, or **easy weeknight dinners**.
- Or each meeting could have an element of surprise by having **"maker's choice"** where everyone chooses their own recipe based on an assigned category.

- How about having **all one category** of food at each meeting - all appetizers, salads, soups or stews, brunch items, etc.?
- OR, maybe it's **any combination of the ideas listed above!**

Consider polling members to gather their interests and see what emerges.

## 5. ADDRESS ADMINISTRATIVE TASKS

As with any group or organization, there are a few administrative tasks that help things operate smoothly. As the cooking club is formed, decide how these types of tasks will be handled.

- Who will take charge of the main calendar for the year?
- Who will send out the monthly calendar invite?
- How much notice will be given for each meeting?
- Who will set each month's menu?
- Will there be a monthly sign-up sheet and how will it be handled?
- If the group has more members than dishes required each month, will those not bringing a dish have any duties or will they get a "free" month?



## 6. CREATE THE MENU AND DETERMINE THE RECIPE ASSIGNMENTS

There are several ways to handle setting the menu and determining who will make each recipe for the gatherings. Here are a few examples:

1. The person hosting could set the entire menu and assign recipes to other members, or have a sign-up sheet available.
2. The person hosting could choose a cookbook and then allow members to sign up to bring a recipe from that book. The host could choose the recipes ahead, or allow members to choose as they wish.
3. The person hosting could set a theme and allow members to choose any recipe from any source that fits that theme.

Recipes should be shared with all members of the group. Using shared cloud storage is one option. Members can then decide how they wish to store recipes for future personal use.

Decide what courses will be included in the menu - appetizer(s), salad, soup, main dish, side dishes, dessert, and perhaps even a cocktail, mocktail, or wine pairing. The host usually prepares the main dish, or at least one of the main dishes if more are needed.

Out of consideration for members, it is best to provide them with at least two weeks' notice, and more, if possible, to plan, shop, and prep. You may even wish to have the following month's theme and menu ready to distribute at the current month's gathering.

If the group is large enough, consider giving the host the next month off after hosting, meaning he/she does not need to cook a dish for the next gathering. If the group is small and all hands are needed, perhaps the previous month's host is given a simple recipe or no-cook option the following month.



## **7. MEET, EAT, LEARN, SOCIALIZE**

Now it's time to enjoy! At the set date and time, everyone gathers at the host's location to share a wonderful meal. Along with socializing, set time aside to talk about each of the recipes prepared.

- What did you like, or dislike?
- Would you change the recipe?
- Was the recipe difficult or easy?
- Did anything surprise you while making the recipe?
- Did you learn or use a new cooking technique?
- Did you use a new ingredient?
- Are there any interesting plating or serving ideas for this recipe?
- Would you make the recipe again?

With a bit of forward planning, a cooking club can be a great way to socialize and connect with others, learn a new cooking skill, or try new cuisines or ingredients. So jump in and have fun!

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