

Friends at the table

Supper clubs serve up good food, friendship

By Debi Shawcross

WHETHER YOU'RE LOOKING for a way to foster relationships or develop new friendships, starting your own supper club could give your social life a delicious boost.

In today's world, where we eat many meals on the run, an intimate dinner with friends is a great luxury. Even though we communicate endlessly with one another by text, Facebook, Twitter and so on, it's all done in a fairly disconnected way. The need to connect in person is more important than ever. Why not combine your love of food and cooking with an evening at home with friends?

That sounds like a dinner party, right? A supper club is a dinner party of sorts, only it's not just about the food. A supper club is designed to strengthen relationships on a deep, ongoing level. Club members commit to meet regularly with common goals in mind.

With these very interests in mind, my husband and I started a supper club several years ago with some of our close friends. Important to all of us was the desire to stay connected as we juggled careers, kids and day-to-day adventures. Our supper club has stayed strong, allowing us to maintain a deeper connection with each other and in a way that is more affordable than an expensive night out with dinner and drinks.

Here are some tips to help you form your own supper club—and enjoy the great food and friendships that can come from it.



Supper clubs are a great way of helping friends stay in touch over a delicious meal.

RON MANVILLE

Decide who will be members.

Are you a group of young married couples eager to entertain? A group of friends looking to strengthen friendships? Are you new to the area and interested in making friends? Are you a group of single professional people interested in networking and expanding relationships?

The Costco Connection

You can find all essential ingredients for your own supper club, from fine roasts to world-class wines, at your local Costco. You can also find select fine foods on Costco.com.

Organize your club with eight to 10 people you regularly want to meet and eat with, including neighbors, couples, single professionals, longtime friends or people you just want to get to know better. You can even have a regular group but leave a couple of seats open to invite special, rotating guests. Regardless, make sure everyone has the same goals. (It's a club, after all, and every club needs a few ground rules.)

Get organized. Decide how often you would like to meet. Every month? Every other month? Maybe quarterly works best for everyone's schedules. For your supper club to



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operate smoothly, everyone will need to commit to a schedule and stick with it.

Are there any types of food to avoid? Early in the process, discuss things like food allergies, aversions and preferences. Are there any vegetarians in the group? It's much better to have an upfront understanding of the types of foods people are most interested in eating or experimenting with.

Share in the cooking. Figure out how to handle menu preparation. For example, one member or couple can bring an appetizer, another can bring the salad, the host can prepare the entrée and another member or couple can bring dessert.

In my supper club, the host decides the menu for the night and everybody works off that plan, ensuring the flavors in each course will flow seamlessly into the next, enhancing the overall dining experience.

Set a budget. Money may or may not be an issue for your group. Simply rotating the host's role and course assignment may be the best way to handle the cost of ingredients. (Everyone pays for the course they are preparing.) Alternatively, you may wish to keep a log of all expenses for each gathering and divide the cost equally. Decide what will work best for all of you.

Keep it interesting. Once you have your supper club up and running, keep it fresh by introducing new ideas. For example, you can vary the dress code or formality of the menu, have an ethnic night (including themed music), host a masquerade party or even meet to eat outside at a park.

On one of my favorite supper club evenings, we attended a concert together and ate our meal tailgate style before heading into the show. We captured the gathering in photos, adding them to our journal of supper club triumphs and mishaps.

Not all dishes will be four stars, but that's OK. The goal of a supper club is to work and eat together, building relationships based on common experiences. Consider it a regular social event that gives you a reason to explore various cooking styles. If you have a group of friends who love to experiment with different foods, the possibilities are endless.

Here are some recipe ideas for your holiday supper club using ingredients from Costco. The two recipes on the next page are from Costco's latest cookbook, *A Decade of Cooking The Costco Way*, which you can see at Costco.com (search "cookbooks").

Holiday Beef Tenderloin

1 (4 to 6 pound) USDA Choice Extreme Trim Beef Tenderloin

1 teaspoon each Kirkland Signature™ Granulated California Garlic (or garlic powder), onion powder and smoked paprika

½ teaspoon lemon-pepper seasoning or Kirkland Signature

Coarse Ground Malabar Pepper
1 tablespoon Kirkland Signature Pure Sea Salt

Heat oven to 425 F.

In a small bowl, blend together the garlic, onion powder, smoked paprika and lemon-pepper seasoning. Line a baking sheet with spray-coated aluminum foil. Place tenderloin onto center of sheet. (Tuck thin end under, if desired, to prevent overcooking of small end.)

Sprinkle or rub the dried seasoning blend all over the roast. Roast 45 to 60 minutes, until meat thermometer inserted in center of the meat reads 140 F for rare or 155 F for medium.

Remove from the oven and bring the foil up around roast to tent and keep warm before carving. Let stand 5 to 10 minutes, then carve.

Serve with green beans and roasted onions, if desired. Makes 8 to 12 servings.

Recipe courtesy of Amy Muzyka-McGuire.

More recipes



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Smoky Apple and Butternut Squash Soup

- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 3 large onions, finely chopped (about 4½ cups)
- 1 teaspoon chipotle chile powder
- 2 pounds butternut squash, peeled and cut into chunks (about 6 cups)
- 1 pound sweet Eastern* apples, peeled and cut into chunks (about 3½ cups)
- 1 cup apple juice (more if necessary)
- 1 cup chicken broth
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper
- Toasted pecans, sour cream and thin apple slices, for garnish (optional)

Heat butter and oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add onions and chipotle powder; cook, stirring, until the onions are tender, about 10 minutes.

Add squash, apples, apple juice, chicken broth, salt and pepper; bring to a boil. Cover and cook over low heat until the apples and squash are very soft, about 30 minutes. Cool.

Puree with an immersion blender or a food processor. Return to the saucepan and bring to a simmer, adding more apple juice or broth if needed.

Garnish with toasted pecans, sour cream swirls and apple slices, if desired. Makes 7 servings.

**Brands may vary by region; substitute a similar product.*

Recipe from *A Decade of Cooking The Costco Way*.

Cranberry-Pecan Spinach Salad

- 1 pound Boskovich Farms* Fresh 'n' Quick spinach, rinsed and torn into bite-size pieces
- 1 cup pecan pieces
- ¾ cup blue cheese crumbles (optional)
- 1 cup dried sweetened cranberries

DRESSING

- ¼ cup white wine vinegar
- ¼ cup cider vinegar
- ½ cup vegetable oil
- ½ cup white sugar
- 2 tablespoons toasted sesame seeds
- 1 tablespoon poppy seeds
- 2 teaspoons minced onion
- ¼ teaspoon paprika

In a large bowl, combine spinach, pecans, blue cheese and cranberries. Set aside.

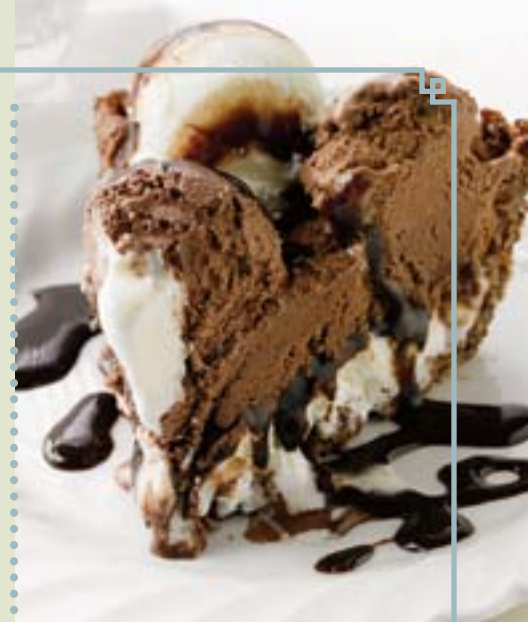
To prepare the dressing, combine all ingredients in a medium bowl and whisk together.

Just before serving, pour the dressing over the spinach mixture and toss well. Makes 6-8 servings.

Tip: Toasted slivered almonds can be substituted for the pecans.

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Recipe from *A Decade of Cooking The Costco Way*.



Crispy Chocolate Ice Cream Mud Pie

- ½ cup Hershey's Syrup, plus more for serving
- 1½ cup Hershey's Special Dark Chocolate Chips or Hershey's Semi-Sweet Chocolate Chips
- 2 cups crisp rice cereal
- 4 cups (1 quart) vanilla ice cream, divided
- 4 cups (1 quart) chocolate ice cream, divided

Butter a 9-inch pie plate.

Place ½ cup chocolate syrup and chocolate chips in a medium microwave-safe bowl. Microwave at medium (50%) for 45 seconds, or until hot; stir until smooth. Reserve ¼ cup of the chocolate syrup mixture; set aside. Add cereal to the remaining chocolate syrup mixture, stirring until well coated; let cool slightly.

Place the cereal mixture in the prepared pie plate and press evenly, using the back of a spoon, onto the bottom and sides to form a crust. Place in the freezer for 15-20 minutes, or until firm.

Spread half of the vanilla ice cream in the crust. Spoon the reserved ¼ cup chocolate syrup mixture over the layer. Spread half of the chocolate ice cream over the sauce.

Top with alternating scoops of vanilla and chocolate ice cream. Cover and return to the freezer until serving time. Drizzle with additional syrup just before serving. Makes 8 servings.

Recipe from *A Decade of Cooking The Costco Way*.