

Chapter 28



Tuna Tartare, page 520.

Food Presentation and Garnish

Until this point, most of the focus of this book has been on the preparation of food, from the selection of ingredients through mise en place and final cooking. We still have not reached our final goal, however. The point of learning and practicing procedures to prepare food of high quality is to ensure the food is eaten and enjoyed.

In other words, our work isn't done until the food we have prepared is arranged on plates or platters and ready to be presented to the diner.

In traditional classical cuisine, until well after the middle of the twentieth century, the normal practice in fine dining establishments was to send the food on platters and in casseroles and other serving dishes to the dining room, where it would be transferred to dinner plates by the serving staff, sometimes after carving or portioning. The chefs who developed nouvelle cuisine, however, wanted to control the appearance of the food down to the last detail and so began to arrange food on dinner plates in the kitchen. Since that time, many styles of plating have come and gone, as chefs have devoted much attention to the appearance and arrangement of food on dinner plates.

Throughout this book, we stress making food look good as well as taste good. We talk about accurate, neat cutting of vegetables and fruits, about proper trimming of meats, poultry, and fish, about grill-marking steaks, about preserving color in cooked vegetables, and about attractive plating of salads. In this chapter, we continue the discussion of making food attractive.

After reading this chapter, you should be able to

1. Explain why attractive food presentation is important.
2. Serve food that is attractively arranged on the plate or platter, with proper balance of color, shape, and texture.
3. Identify common terms from classical garniture that are still in general use today.
4. Garnish a banquet platter with attractive and appropriate vegetable accompaniments.
5. Plan and arrange attractive food platters for buffets.

HOT FOOD PRESENTATION

We eat for enjoyment as well as for nutrition and sustenance. Cooking is not just a trade but an art that appeals to our senses of taste, smell, and sight.

“The eye eats first” is a well-known saying. Our first impressions of a plate of food set our expectations. The sight of food stimulates our appetite, starts our digestive juices flowing, and makes us eager to dig in. Our meal becomes exciting and stimulating.

On the other hand, if the food looks carelessly served, tossed onto the plate in a sloppy manner, we assume it was cooked with the same lack of care. If the colors are pale and washed out, with no color accent, we expect the flavors to be bland and monotonous. If the size of the plate makes the steak *look* small (even if it’s not), we go away unsatisfied.

Your job as a cook and a chef, then, is to get your customers interested in your food or, better yet, excited about it. You can’t afford to turn them off before they even taste it. Your success depends on making your customers happy.

Fundamentals of Plating

When a chef plans a new dish, appearance as well as flavor must be considered. Turn back to page 82 and look once again at the section called “Building Flavor Profiles.” Remember that the senses of sight, taste, smell, and touch all come into play when we evaluate and enjoy food. How a dish looks is part of the identity of the dish, just like how it tastes, smells, and feels in the mouth.

In other words, how a dish looks is not something you think about only after you have prepared it. It is something you have in mind from the beginning of preparation. Remembering this helps you create natural-looking presentations, so the food looks like what it is rather than like an artificial construction with a complicated design.

Most of us have had the experience in a restaurant of seeing another dish carried past our table by a server and immediately thinking, “I want whatever that is.” Only rarely is this thought prompted by an over-elaborate, fussy arrangement. Rather, the dish appeals to us most likely because it simply has the appearance and the aroma of well-prepared food.

Three Essentials of Food Presentation

Making food look good requires careful attention to all kitchen tasks. The following three principles should be observed in order to create attractive food. Note that only one of them concerns arranging the food on the plate.

GOOD PREPARATION AND COOKING TECHNIQUES

If vegetables are improperly cut during prep, the plate presentation will look improper. If meat is badly trimmed before cooking, a fancy plating design won’t correct it. If a fish is overcooked and dry or a green vegetable is drab and mushy, it won’t look good no matter what you do with it. On the other hand, well-prepared and properly cooked food with a good aroma is usually appealing all by itself.

PROFESSIONAL WORK HABITS

Serving attractive food is largely a matter of being neat and careful and using common sense. This is an aspect of the professionalism we discussed in Chapter 1. Professionals take pride in their work and in the food they serve. They don’t send a plate to the dining room with sauce accidentally dribbled across the rim and maybe a thumbprint or two for extra effect—not because their supervisors told them not to or because a rule in a textbook says so but because pride of workmanship prevents it.

VISUAL SENSE

Beyond just being neat, effective food presentation depends on developing an understanding of techniques involving balance, arrangement, and garniture. These are the subjects of our next sections.

Balance

Balance is a term we used when talking about menu planning in Chapter 5. The rules of good menu balance also apply to plating. Select foods and garnishes that offer variety and contrast while avoiding combinations that are awkward or jarring.

COLORS

Two or three colors on a plate are usually more interesting than just one. Visualize this combination: poached chicken breast with suprême sauce, mashed potatoes, and steamed cauliflower. Appetizing? Or how about fried chicken, French fries, and corn? Not quite as bad, but still a little monotonous.

Many hot foods, especially meats, poultry, and fish, have little color other than shades of brown, gold, or white. It helps to select vegetables or accompaniments that add color interest—one reason why green vegetables are so popular.

Garnish is often unnecessary, especially if the accompaniments have color, but it is very important in some cases. The classic combination of broiled steak (brown) and baked potato (brown and white) looks a little livelier with a few asparagus spears on the plate or even with the simple addition of a healthy sprig of watercress.

SHAPES

Plan for variety of shape and form as well as of color. For example, you probably do not want to serve Brussels sprouts with meatballs and new potatoes. Too many items of the same shape, in this case round, looks monotonous or even odd. Green beans and whipped potatoes might be better choices for accompaniment. Try for a variety of shapes that work together well.

Cutting vegetables into different shapes gives you great flexibility. Carrots, for example, which can be cut into dice, rounds, or sticks (bâtonnet, julienne, etc.), can be adapted to nearly any plate.

TEXTURES

Textures are not strictly visual considerations, but they are as important in plating as in menu planning (Chapter 5). Good balance requires a variety of textures on the plate. Perhaps the most common error is serving too many soft or puréed foods, such as baked salmon loaf with whipped potatoes and puréed squash.

FLAVORS

You can't see flavors, either, but this is one more factor you must consider when balancing colors, shapes, and textures on the plate. Consult the menu planning guidelines in Chapter 5.

Portion Size

Portion sizes are important for presentation as well as for costing.

MATCH PORTION SIZES AND PLATES

Select plates large enough to hold all the items without crowding. Too small a plate makes an overcrowded, jumbled, messy appearance.

On the other hand, too large a plate may make the portions look skimpy. If a plate does not look sufficiently full, customers may feel they are not getting good value.

BALANCE THE PORTION SIZES OF THE ITEMS ON THE PLATE

One item, generally a meat, poultry, or fish preparation, is usually considered the main item on the plate. It is the center of attention and is larger than the accompaniments. Don't let the main item get lost amid excessive garnish and huge portions of vegetable and starch items.

Where there is no main item, as in some vegetable plates, strive for a logical balance of portions.

Arrangement on the Plate



Until recent years, plated main courses followed a standard pattern: meat or fish item at the front of the plate (closest to the diner), vegetable and starch items at the rear.

This arrangement is still the most commonly used because it is one of the simplest and most convenient. Nevertheless, many chefs are eager to display their creativity with imaginative plating presentations.

In high-end restaurants in both Europe and North America, for most of the twentieth century, food was not plated in the kitchen. Instead, items were arranged on platters and presented to the diner by the serving staff. After performing various finishing tasks, such as carving small roasts, the dining room staff then plated the main items, side dishes, and sauces and set them before the customers. All this changed in the 1970s, when chefs practicing *Nouvelle Cuisine* (see page 5) decided they wanted more control over plate appearance and began plating in the kitchen. Since then, plating styles have been changing constantly, and what is considered fashionable one year may be out of style the next.

A style popular with today's chefs is to stack everything in one multilayered tower in the center of the plate. When used with restraint, this can make an effective and impressive plating. Often, however, it is carried to extremes, and customers are faced with the job of carefully deconstructing a tower of food and rearranging the items on the plate so they can begin eating. Some chefs like this style so much they use it for nearly everything on the menu. Perhaps it works best for small dishes, such as some appetizers and the small portions of a tasting menu. It is important to keep the convenience and comfort of the diner in mind when plating.

A plate arrangement consists of some or all of the following four components. The first one is almost always present. The others may or may not be included on the same plate.

Main item. This is usually a meat, poultry, or fish item, although it may also be a pasta dish or a vegetarian item.

Side dishes or accompaniments. These are usually vegetable and starch preparations that are appropriate to serve with the main item. The term *side dish*, usually abbreviated to *side*, was originally used for separate dishes of vegetables or other items served on the side of the main plate. Today we use the term for any substantial vegetable or starch accompaniment.

Sauce or sauces. Sauces, if used, may be served around, under, or over other items on the plate.

Other garnish. In classical cuisine, as you will read on page 911, the term *garnish* was used for any item served with the main item. It included side dishes as well as purely decorative items. Today, we use the term primarily for small edible items (smaller than side dishes) intended to enhance the visual appeal of the dish. Flavors and textures of garnishes should serve as an appropriate complement or contrast to the main item.

Today's plating styles are many and varied. The following descriptions are examples of popular plating styles, and they serve as starting points for countless variations. The accompanying photos, as well as the remaining photos accompanying recipes throughout the text, show additional style variations and interpretations.



- The classic arrangement: main item in front, vegetables, starch items, and garnish at the rear.
- The main item alone in the center of the plate, sometimes with a sauce or simple garnish.
- The main item in the center, with vegetables distributed randomly around it, sometimes with a sauce underneath.
- The main item in the center, with neat piles of vegetables carefully arranged around it in a pattern.
- A starch or vegetable item heaped in the center; the main item sliced and leaning up against it; additional vegetables, garnish, and/or sauce on the plate around the center items.
- Main item, vegetable and starch accompaniments, and other garnish stacked neatly one atop the other in the center of the plate. Sauces or additional garnish may be placed around the outside.

- Vegetable in center of plate, sometimes with sauce; main item (in slices, medallions, small pieces, etc.) arranged around it toward the outside of the plate.
- Slices of the main item shingled on a bed of vegetables or a purée of vegetables or starch, with, perhaps, additional garnish to one side or around.
- Asymmetrical or random-looking arrangements that don't seem to follow any pattern. These often create the impression that the food was rushed to the dining room the instant it was cooked, without thought to the design. Of course, to be effective, these arrangements must be carefully thought out in advance.
- Arrangements resembling abstract art. Carefully cut portions of foods are arranged in an asymmetrical pattern, perhaps on a rectangular or other nonstandard plate, with streaks or ribbons of sauce to unite the various elements. Such arrangements are more appropriate to first courses or to the many small courses that might make up a tasting menu.

The following guidelines will help you plate attractive, appealing food, no matter what plating style you are using.

1. Keep food off the rim of the plate.

This guideline means, in part, selecting a plate large enough to hold the food without it hanging off the edge. In general, the rim should be thought of as the frame for the food presentation.

Some chefs like to decorate this frame with a sprinkling of spice or chopped herbs or dots of a sauce. When tastefully done, this can enhance the appeal of the plate, but, if overdone, it can make the plate look unattractive. Some restaurants got into the habit of throwing some badly chopped parsley over every plate that left the kitchen. Over the years, this practice has been so carelessly done, and—worse—so many customers have soiled their sleeves on sauced rims, that decorating the rim is falling out of fashion.

2. Arrange the items for the convenience of the customer.

Put the best side of the meat forward. The customer should not have to turn the item around to start on it. The bony or fatty edge of the steak, the back side of the half-duckling, the boniest parts of the chicken pieces, and so on, should face away from the customer.

Often the most imaginative platings are the most inconvenient. Tall, precarious towers of food are difficult to eat, and the customer may have to rearrange the food before eating.

3. Keep space between items, unless, of course, they are stacked on one another.

Don't pile everything together in a jumbled heap. Each item should have its own identity. This is, of course, related also to selecting the right plate size.

Even when items are stacked, this should be done neatly so that each item is identifiable.

4. Maintain unity.

Basically, there is unity when the plate looks like one meal that happens to be made up of several items rather than like several unrelated items that just happen to be on the same plate.

Create a center of attention and relate everything to it. The meat is generally the center of attention and is often placed front and center. Other items are placed around and behind it so as to balance it and keep the customer's eyes centered rather than pulled off the edge of the plate.

Visual balance is similar to the balance of flavors discussed on page 82. In that discussion, we introduced the concept of primary flavors and supporting flavors. The primary flavors, you recall, are those of the main ingredients, and the supporting or secondary flavors are those of additional ingredients selected to enhance, harmonize with, or contrast with the primary flavors. Visual design works in a similar way. The main item on the plate is the primary design element. Other items, including side dishes and garnishes, are supporting design elements. Each item should enhance, harmonize with, or contrast with the main element and each other in a pleasing way.



5. Make every component count.

Garnishes are not added just for color. Sometimes they are needed to balance a plate by providing an additional element. Two items on a plate often look unbalanced, but adding a simple sprig of parsley completes the picture.

On the other hand, don't add unnecessary elements, especially unnecessary inedible garnishes. In many or even most cases, the food is attractive and colorful without garnish, and adding it clutters the plate and increases your food cost as well.

In any case, it is usually best to add nothing to the plate that is not intended to be eaten. Before you place the parsley alongside the fish fillet or plant a bushy sprig of rosemary in the mashed potatoes, first consider if the plate needs an extra item. If it does, then consider whether or not it wouldn't be better to add something edible to enhance the other foods with its taste and texture as well as its appearance.

6. When using a sauce or gravy, add it attractively.

Sauces are essential parts of many dishes, but sometimes ladling sauce all over an item hides colors and shapes. If the item is attractive by itself, let the customer see it. Ladle the sauce around or under it, or possibly covering only part of it, as with a band of sauce across the center. Always think of the sauce as part of the overall design of the plate.

7. Keep it simple.

As you have heard before, simplicity is more attractive than overworked, contrived arrangements and complicated designs. Unusual patterns are occasionally effective, but avoid making the food look too cute or too elaborate.

One of the simplest plating styles can also be one of the most attractive if it is carefully done—that is, placing only the meat or fish item and its sauce, if any, in the center of the plate, and serving vegetable accompaniments in separate dishes. This method is often used in restaurants to simplify service in the kitchen. However, it is usually best to use this method for only some of the menu items in order to avoid monotony.

Temperature

Serve hot foods hot, on hot plates.

Serve cold foods cold, on cold plates.

Your arrangement of beautiful food will not make much of a final impression if you forget this rule.

Garnish

What Is Garnish?

The word *garnish* is derived from a French word meaning “to adorn” or “to furnish.” In English, we use the word to mean “to decorate or embellish a food item by the addition of other items.” The word is used also for the decorative items themselves.

This definition, at first, seems vague because it could include just about anything. To many people, the word *garnish* means a sprig of parsley haphazardly placed on the plate. Just as common is the practice in some restaurants of adopting a single garnish and using it routinely on every plate, from prime rib to batter-fried shrimp. No one garnish is appropriate for every plate, just as no one side dish is appropriate for every plate.

In fact, the term *garnish* has been used for a great variety of preparations and techniques in the history of classical and modern cuisines. Today, the use of parsley sprigs on every plate has become rare, and we are again using the word *garnish* in a more traditional way.

Classical Garnish

In classical cooking, the terms *garnish* and *garniture* have been used the way we use the term *accompagniments*. In other words, garnishes are any items placed on the platter or plate or in the soup bowl in addition to the main item. It happens that these accompaniments also make the food look more attractive, but that is not the emphasis.

The classical French chef had a tremendous repertoire of simple and elaborate garnishes, and they all had specific names. A trained chef, or a well-informed diner, for that matter, knew the word *Rachel* on the menu meant the dish was served with artichoke bottoms filled with poached marrow, and *Portugaise* meant a garnish of stuffed tomatoes.

There were so many of these names, however, that no one could remember them all. So they were cataloged in handbooks to be used by chefs. *Le Répertoire de la Cuisine*, first published in 1914 and one of these handbooks, has 209 listings in the garnish section alone, not to mention nearly 7,000 other preparations, all with their own names. The garnishes may be as simple as the one called *Concorde* or as complex as the one called *Tortue*, quoted here to give you an idea of the complexity and elaborateness of *classical garnish*.

Concorde (*for large joints*)—Peas, glazed carrots, mashed potatoes.

Tortue (*for Entrées*)—Quenelles, mushroom heads, gherkins, garlic, collops of tongue and calves' brains, small fried eggs, heart-shaped croutons, crayfish, slices of truffles. Tortue sauce.

CLASSICAL TERMS IN THE MODERN KITCHEN

Many of the classical names for garnishes are still used in modern kitchens, although they have lost the precise meanings they once had. You will encounter some of these terms in your career, so it is worthwhile learning them.

Remember that the following definitions are not the classical ones but simply the garnish or accompaniment generally indicated by the terms in today's kitchens.

Bouquetière: bouquet of vegetables

Printanière: spring vegetables

Jardinière: garden vegetables

Primeurs: first spring vegetables

These four terms refer to assortments of fresh vegetables, including carrots, turnips, peas, pearl onions, green beans, cauliflower, sometimes asparagus, and artichokes.

Clamart: peas

Crécy: carrots

Doria: cucumbers (cooked in butter)

Dubarry: cauliflower

Fermière: carrots, turnips, onions, and celery, cut into uniform slices

Florentine: spinach

Forestière: mushrooms

Judic: braised lettuce

Lyonnais: onions

Niçoise: tomatoes concassé cooked with garlic

Parmentier: potatoes

Princesse: asparagus

Provençale: tomatoes with garlic, parsley, and, sometimes, mushrooms and/or olives

Vichy: carrots (especially Carrots Vichy, p. 572)

Modern Hot Platter Garnish

In classical cuisine, food was nearly always brought to the dining room on large platters and then served, rather than being plated in the kitchen, as is most often done today.

Although this practice is not nearly as common as it was a few decades ago, it is still sometimes used for banquet service, and nothing stimulates appetites as much as a succulent roast on a silver platter, sumptuously adorned with a colorful variety of vegetable garnishes.

The classical garnitures most often adapted to modern platter presentation are those called *bouquetière*, *jardinière*, and *printanière*. At one time, these were specific vegetable assortments cut in prescribed ways. Today the terms are taken in a more general way indicating colorful assortments of fresh vegetables.

Platter garnish need not be elaborate or difficult to prepare. A simple assortment of colorful vegetables, carefully cut and properly cooked to retain color and texture, is appropriate to the most elegant presentation. Stuffed vegetables, such as tomato halves filled with peas, are a little fancier, but still easy to prepare. Borders of duchesse potatoes are also popular (see p. 613).

Many of the rules of proper plating apply to platter arrangement as well—for example, those that call for neatness, balance of color and shape, unity, and preserving the individuality of the items. Following are a few more guidelines that apply to hot platter presentation and garnish.

1. Vegetables should be in easily served units.

In other words, don't heap green peas or mashed potatoes on one corner of the platter. More suitable are vegetables such as cauliflower, broccoli, boiled tomatoes, asparagus spears, whole green beans, mushroom caps, or anything that comes in large or easy-to-handle pieces. Small vegetables such as peas can be easily served if they are used to fill artichoke bottoms, tomato halves, or tartlet shells.

2. Have the correct number of portions of each item.

Vegetables like Brussels sprouts and tournéed carrots are easily portioned in the dining room if they are arranged in little portion-size piles.

3. Arrange the garnishes around the platter to get the best effect from the different colors and shapes.

The meat, poultry, or fish is usually placed in the center of the platter, or in a row or rows, and the garnishes arranged around it.

4. Avoid being too elaborate.

While it is sometimes desirable to make ornate platters, simplicity is usually preferable to an overworked appearance. Let the attractiveness of the food speak for itself. The garnish should never dominate or hide the meat, which is the center of attention.

5. Serve extra sauce or gravy in a sauceboat.

If it is appropriate, dress or nap the meat or fish items with some of the sauce, but don't drown the entire platter with it.

6. Serve hot foods hot, on a hot platter.

Don't spend so much time arranging the food that it's cold by the time it reaches the dining room.

KEY POINTS TO REVIEW

- Why is it important to plate food attractively?
- What is meant by *balance* when applied to plate arrangements? What elements should be balanced?
- What are some examples of different plating styles?
- What guidelines should be observed when plating food or planning plate arrangements?

COLD FOOD PRESENTATION AND BUFFET SERVICE

The buffet is a popular and profitable form of food presentation found in nearly every kind of food-service operation. There are at least three reasons for this popularity:

1. Visual appeal.

An attractive presentation of foods has the effect of lavishness and ample quantity, and careful arrangement and garnish suggest quality as well.

2. Efficiency.

The buffet allows the restaurant to serve a large number of people in a short time with relatively few service personnel.

3. Adaptability.

Buffet service is adaptable to nearly every kind of food (except items that must be cooked to order, like broiled and deep-fried foods) and to all price ranges, occasions, restaurant styles, and local food customs.

Buffet Arrangement and Appearance

The buffet's visual appeal is, perhaps, its greatest attraction for the customer. Eye appeal of food is always important, but perhaps nowhere more important than on a buffet, because the appearance sells the food. A buffet is not just food service—it is food display.

Lavishness and Abundance

Above all else, a buffet should look lavish and plentiful. The appearance of an abundance of food beautifully laid out is exciting and stimulating to the appetite. There are many ways to create this look.

1. Color.

A variety of colors is as vital on a buffet as it is on a single plate. Plan menus and garnish so you have enough color on the table.

2. Height.

Flat foods on flat trays on flat tables are uninteresting to the eye.

A centerpiece is an important feature, giving height and focus to the buffet. Ice carvings, tall sculptures, and floral or fruit displays are some possibilities. These should be placed on a separate table behind the food table.

Centerpieces on individual platters also add height. Large food items such as large cheeses and whole roasts being carved at the table are also effective. Multilevel tables, when available, are used to good effect.

3. Full platters and bowls.

Replenish items as they become depleted. A nearly empty bowl isn't as appetizing as a full one.

Arrange platters so they still have interest even when portions have been removed (more on this later).

4. Proper spacing.

While you shouldn't crowd the items, don't spread them so far apart that the table looks half empty.

Simplicity

This sounds like a contradiction to the lavishness principle, but it's not. You need to strike a good balance between the two. Lavishness is not the same as clutter.

1. Overdesigned, overdecorated food scares people away from eating it.

How many times have you heard someone say, "Oh, it's so pretty I don't want to touch it"? Even if they don't say it, they may think it.

Too much design detracts from the food. Sometimes food is so overdecorated that it no longer looks like food. This completely defeats the purpose. The customer should at least be able to identify the food for what it is.

2. Excessive garnish is quickly destroyed as customers take portions.

Orderliness

A buffet should look like it was planned, not like it just happened. Customers prefer food presentations that look carefully done, not just thrown together.

1. Simple arrangements are much easier to keep neat and orderly than complicated designs.
2. Colors and shapes should look lively and varied, but make sure they go together and do not clash.
3. Keep the style consistent. If it's formal, then everything should be formal. If it's casual or rustic, then every part of the presentation should be casual or rustic. If it's a Mexican fiesta, don't include German sauerbraten just because your specialty happens to be sauerbraten.

This is true not only of the food but of the dishes and serving pieces, too. Don't use ornate silver serving pieces for a country theme, for example.

Menu and Serving Sequence

Practical reasons as well as visual appeal determine the order in which foods are arranged on the buffet. As far as possible, it is good to have items in the proper menu order (for example, appetizers first, main course afterward, desserts last) if only to avoid confusing the customers, who might otherwise wonder what the food is and how much they should take. But there are many reasons for changing the order. The following should be taken into account when arranging a buffet.

1. Hot foods are best served last. If served first, hot foods get cool while the guests make other selections from the cold foods. Also, it is more effective, visually, to place the decorative cold platters first and the less attractive chafing dishes last.
2. The more expensive foods are usually placed after the less expensive items. This gives you some control of food cost, as the guests' plates will be nearly full of other attractive foods by the time they get to the costly items.
3. Sauces and dressings should be placed next to the items with which they are to be served. Otherwise, the customer might not match them with the right foods.
4. A separate dessert table is often a good idea. This approach allows guests to make a separate trip for dessert without interfering with the main serving line. It is also possible, if the menu is large, to have a separate appetizer table.
5. Plates, of course, must be the first items on the table. Silverware, napkins, and other items not needed until the guest sits down to eat should be at the end of the buffet table or set in place on the dining tables.

The Cocktail Buffet

One kind of buffet doesn't conform to this menu order pattern. The cocktail buffet displays appetizers intended to accompany drinks and other refreshments at receptions, cocktail parties, and cocktail hours preceding banquets and dinners. There is no serving line—or, looking at it a different way, there is a separate line for each item.

1. Only appetizer-type foods are served: tasty, well-seasoned foods in small portions.
2. Stacks of small plates are placed beside each item rather than at the beginning of the table.

3. The table or tables must be easy to get to from all parts of the room and must not block traffic. Do not place them next to the entry because guests gather around them, blocking movement into and out of the room.

Cold Platter Presentation

The cold platter is the mainstay of the buffet and offers the most opportunity for visual artistry. It also can be one of the most demanding forms of food presentation, particularly in the case of show platters, which require great precision, patience, and artistic sense.

Cold platters can range from a simple tray of cold cuts to elaborate constructions of pâtés, meats, poultry, or fish decorated with aspic, truffles, and vegetable flowers. In this chapter, we have space only for a discussion of general guidelines you can apply both to formal buffet platters and to simple cold food arrangements. To learn more detailed, complex techniques, you must depend on your instructors, more advanced courses, and on-the-job experience. But this section should help you take the foods available in whatever kitchen you find yourself working and produce an attractive, appetizing buffet.

Basic Principles of Platter Presentation

1. The three elements of a buffet platter:
 - Centerpiece or *grosse pièce* (gross pyess). This may be an uncut portion of the main food item, such as a pâté or a cold roast, decorated and displayed whole. It may be a separate but related item, such as a molded salmon mousse on a platter of poached slices of salmon in aspic. It may be something as simple as a bowl or *ravier* (rahv yay; an oval relish dish) of sauce or condiment. Or it may be strictly for decoration, such as a butter sculpture or a squash vase filled with vegetable flowers. Whether or not the *grosse pièce* is intended to be eaten, it should be made of edible materials.
 - The slices or serving portions of the main food item, arranged artistically.
 - The garnish, arranged artistically, in proportion to the cut slices.
2. The food should be easy to handle and serve, so one portion can be removed without ruining the arrangement.
3. A simple design is best. Simple arrangements are easier to serve, more appetizing than overworked food, and more likely to remain attractive when they are half demolished by the guests.

Simple arrangements may be the hardest to produce. Everything must be perfect because less decoration is available to divide the attention.
4. Attractive platter presentations may be made on silver or other metals, mirrors, china, plastic, wood, or many other materials, as long as they are presentable and suitable for use with food. Metal platters that might cause discoloration or metallic flavors are often covered with a thin layer of aspic before the food is placed on them.
5. Once a piece of food has touched the tray, do not remove it. Shiny silver or mirror trays are easily smudged, and you'll have to wash the tray and start over again. This shows the importance of good planning.

Following this rule also helps eliminate overhandling of food, which is a bad sanitary practice.
6. Think of the platter as part of the whole buffet. It must look attractive and appropriate not only by itself but among the other presentations on the table. The arrangement should always be planned from the same angle from which it will be seen on the buffet.

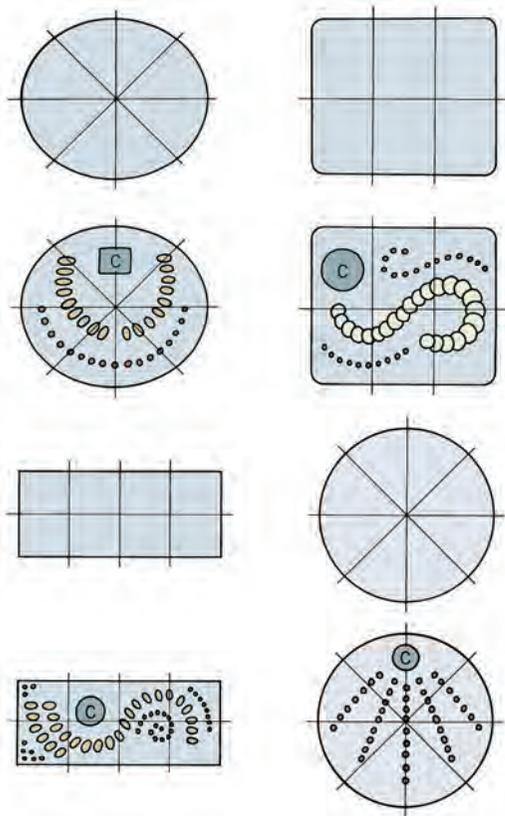


Figure 28.1 Begin your planning sketch of a buffet platter by dividing the tray into six or eight sections. This helps you lay out a balanced, symmetrical design. The examples shown here indicate the placement of the main items (usually slices of foods), the centerpiece (labeled *c*), and the garnish (shown as tiny circles).

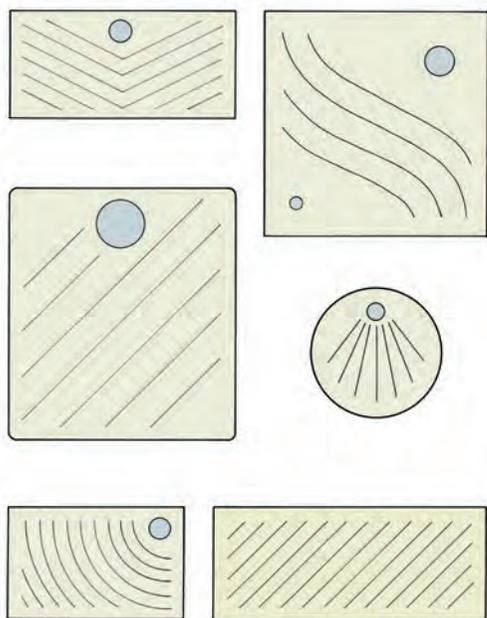


Figure 28.2 Arranging rows of foods in curves or angled lines gives movement to the design.

Designing the Platter

1. Plan ahead.

Making a sketch is a good idea. Otherwise, you might have half the food on the platter and suddenly realize you have to start over because everything doesn't fit the way you had hoped. The result is wasted time and excessive handling of food. One way to start a sketch is to divide the platter into six or eight equal parts, as in Figure 28.1. This helps you avoid lopsided or crooked arrangements by giving you equally spaced markers as guides. It is relatively easy, then, to sketch in a balanced, symmetrical layout, as the examples show.

2. Plan for movement in your design.

This doesn't mean you should mount the food on little wheels. It means that a good design makes the eye move across the platter, following the lines you have set up.

Most food for platters consists of single small portions arranged in rows or lines. The trick is to put movement into those lines by curving or angling them, as shown in Figure 28.2. In general, curves and angles are said to have movement. Square corners do not.

3. Give the design a focal point.

This is the function of the centerpiece, which emphasizes and strengthens the design by giving it direction and height. This may be done directly, by having the lines point at it, or more subtly, by having the lines angle toward it or sweep around it in graceful curves. Again, see Figures 28.1 and 28.2.

Note that the centerpiece isn't always in the center, in spite of its name. Because of its height, it should be at the back or toward the side so it doesn't hide the food. Remember, you are designing the platter from the customer's point of view.

It's not necessary for every platter on the buffet to have a centerpiece. Some of them should, however, or the buffet will lack height and be less interesting to the eye.

4. Keep items in proportion.

The main items on the platter—the slices of meat, pâté, or whatever—should *look* like the main items. The centerpiece should not be so large or so tall that it totally dominates the platter. The garnish should enhance, not overwhelm, the main item in size, height, or quantity. The number of portions of garnish should be in proportion to the amount of the main item.

The size of the platter should be in proportion to the amount of food. Don't select one that is so small as to become crowded or so large as to look almost empty even before the first guest has arrived.

Keep enough space between items or between rows so the platter doesn't look jumbled or confused.

Figure 28.1 indicates placement of garnish as well as of the main item. Note how the arrangement of garnish reflects or accents the pattern established by the sliced foods.

5. Let the guest see the best side of everything.

Angle overlapping slices and wedge-shaped pieces toward the customer. Make sure the best side of each slice is face up.

Cheese Platters

Cheese trays are popular on both luncheon buffets as a main course item and on dinner buffets as a dessert item. Cheeses are presented much differently than the other cold buffet foods we have been talking about.

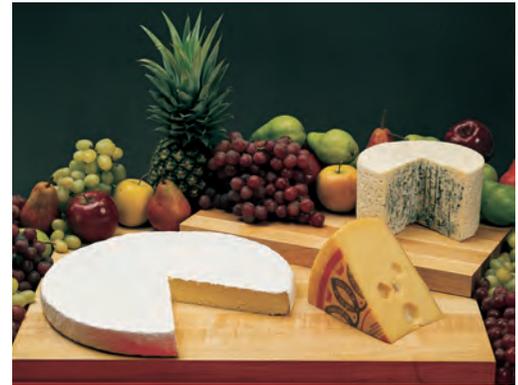
First, whole cheeses or cheeses in large pieces are generally more attractive than an arrangement of slices. This also helps the guest identify the varieties. Be sure to supply several knives so guests can cut their own portions.

Second, an assortment of fresh fruit is often included on a cheese tray. This adds a great deal to the appearance of a cheese presentation, and the flavors go well with cheese. The photograph on this page shows an example of a cheese and fruit presentation.

A Note on Sanitation

Cold food for buffets presents a special sanitation problem. This is because the food spends a great deal of time out of refrigeration while it is being assembled and decorated and again while it sits on the buffet. For this reason, it is particularly important to follow all the rules of safe food handling. Keep foods refrigerated whenever they are not being worked on. Also, keep them chilled until the last minute before they are brought out for service.

For a buffet service that lasts a long time, it is a good idea to arrange each course or item on a number of small platters rather than on one big one. The replacements can then be refrigerated until needed.



One type of cheese and fruit presentation for buffet service.

Hot Foods for Buffets

Everything you have learned about the preparation and holding of hot foods in quantity applies to hot foods for buffets. Hot items are nearly always served from chafing dishes, which may be ornate silver affairs or simple steam table pans kept warm over hot water. These foods cannot be elaborately decorated and garnished the way cold foods can. On the other hand, the bright, fresh, juicy appearance and good aroma of properly cooked hot food is generally sufficient to arouse appetites.

Hot foods for chafing dishes should be easily portioned (such as vegetables served with a kitchen spoon) or already portioned in the pan (braised pork chops, sliced baked ham, and poached fish fillets, for example). Items less suitable for buffets are those that must be cooked to order and served immediately, such as most broiled and deep-fried foods.

Whole roasts are popular items at buffets, carved to order by a member of the kitchen staff. Especially attractive are large roasts such as hams, turkeys, and large cuts of beef such as steamship round.

As previously noted, hot foods are best placed at the end of the buffet so they do not cool on the guests' plates before they are seated and so the decorated cold foods can steal the show.

KEY POINTS TO REVIEW

- What garnish terms from classical cuisine are still used today? What do they mean?
- What guidelines should be observed when arranging hot foods on platters?
- When planning a buffet, how do you create the impression of lavishness? What guidelines help you achieve simplicity and orderliness?
- In general, in what order should items be arranged on a buffet?
- What guidelines should be observed when planning a cold buffet platter?

TERMS FOR REVIEW

garnish	garniture	classical garnish	grosse pièce	ravier
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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discuss the idea of professionalism and how it applies to the presentation of food. 2. Following are several popular food combinations. Describe what plating problems they present, if any, and how you might efficiently and economically solve them. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fish and chips (deep-fried fillets and French fries) Prime rib of beef and baked potato Meat loaf, mashed potatoes, and gravy Open-faced hot turkey sandwich Beef stroganoff and egg noodles Chicken à la king in a patty shell | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. What is meant by plating food for the convenience of the customer, and how does this affect other rules of plating? 4. What is the difference between a cocktail buffet and a luncheon or dinner buffet? 5. Customers like to see a lot of food on a buffet. Is it correct to say, then, that the best way to please customers is to put out as much food as possible? Explain your answer. 6. When you are preparing a cold buffet platter, why is it a good idea to plan ahead by making a sketch? What would you include in the sketch? What do the terms <i>movement</i> and <i>focal point</i> mean in platter design? |
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