

Better Homes and Gardens®

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Refresh heart
and home
with lavender


sweet beauty

16 SUMMER START-UPS

Cool Drinks • Hammocks
Flowers • Reading Club
Budget Trips • Backyard Parties
Decorating with Kids • & More

PLUS: Special
summer reading
By NORA ROBERTS



A close-up photograph of a young girl with light brown, wavy hair. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. She is holding a cupcake in her hands. The cupcake has white frosting and several fresh raspberries on top. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting an outdoor setting.

Polka-Dot
Angel Food
Cupcakes

Recipe begins
on page 265

Easy does it
Summer

A SPIRIT OF SPONTANEITY, A MOOD OF PLENTY,
WILLING HANDS, AND A BIT OF PLANNING MAKE IT
ALL HAPPEN AT A CASUAL GATHERING FOR FRIENDS.

BY RICHARD SWEARINGER PHOTOGRAPHS BY EDMUND BARR FOOD STYLIST ROBYN VALARIK PRODUCED BY CAROL HACKER



A


great summer gathering is the sum of its sensations: Afternoon sun alights on tall skewers of the freshest summer fruit; the taste of deviled eggs topped with bacon and a healthy dose of mustard; the laughter of familiar voices gathered around the grill.

Making wonderful moments happen for guests is simple when you understand that your life, at least your backyard life, is not a one-person show. Even if you're like Carrie Brown—the owner of a restaurant, specialty food company, and general store—when you let guests help, the day is elevated from merely entertaining to truly enchanting.

"I used to try to make everything perfect and flawless, but I didn't enjoy my own parties," says Carrie, whose Jimtown Store sits alongside a rural highway in the Sonoma County wine country north of San Francisco. "Then I learned to loosen up and let everyone help, so we could all sit back and enjoy the chaos of the moment."

Consider the dishes featured in this story. Carrie spun her magic on picnic favorites with just the right balance of do-ahead anxiety-tamers for the host and predinner activities for the guests. For example, the spicy filling for Slow-Simmered Pork Sandwiches can be made the day before, but she's also included Grilled Salmon Potato Tacos, which will allow someone the opportunity for a little show-offmanship at the barbecue. The Lavender Cooler and Hibiscus Tea are made in the morning, but Fruit Wands are the perfect project for the visual artists of your dinner circle.

The help of her sister Julie and a to-do list for company are what allows Carrie Brown (at right in the photo above left) to keep the party moving. Treating the vegetables for the Green Goddess Dip (right) just like flowers—using just three coordinating colors and putting them in simple white vases and bowls—adds drama to appetizer time.



Green Goddess Dip

Recipe begins on page 260

It's thoughtful food; we've
taken a tried-and-true recipe
and made it a little bit special.

CARRIE BROWN



Sweet Corn, Red Pepper, and Cheese Salad

Recipe begins on page 262



Carrie's key to successful delegation is giving people specific, but fun, assignments. Before her gatherings she creates a to-do list for the close friends who come to the party. When friends are working for their supper she tries to ensure they're supplied with all the tools needed for the task at hand. Carrie also posts notes on serving bowls and platters to designate which goes with each recipe.

Cooking takes place mainly in the tiny kitchen of the marigold yellow cottage with periwinkle trim that Carrie shares with her two dogs, Moses the dachshund and Patty Lewis the redbone coonhound. The house is eclectically furnished with everything from early 18th century Italian chairs to a sock monkey collection. She also has what she calls a "wardrobe" of outdoor benches, tables and chairs collected over the years that transform a circular patch of lawn in her garden into a summertime dining room. A collection of antique quilts and bedspreads are pressed into service for those who prefer to lounge on the grass.

An artist, Carrie was a decorative painter for years in New

Chef and long-time friend Ray Tang (*above*) grills the salmon that will be folded into tacos (*opposite*). A corn salad and deviled eggs (*right and above right*) round out the menu.



Bacon-Avocado Deviled Eggs

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Grilled Salmon Tacos

Recipe begins on page 262





Slow-Simmered Pork Sandwiches with Roasted Tomato-Jalapeño Vinaigrette

Recipe begins on page 268

York. But when she and her late husband, John Werner, discovered the store—forlorn and for sale—in 1987, they knew they had found a new calling. They revived it as a restaurant, general store, and antiques business with the idea that it would cater to neighborhood farmers as well as sightseers.

“I’ve continued to think of myself as an artist,” says Carrie. “I look at the entire property and the business as my greater studio. It’s an opportunity to try new ideas—forever reinventing Jimtown.”

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A little padding—such as a moving blanket—beneath quilts makes lingering over the Slow-Simmered Pork Sandwiches (above) or Polka-Dot Angel Food Cupcakes (right) a comfy way to while away the twilight.





Hibiscus Tea and Lavender Cooler

Recipe begins on page 270



EASY DOES IT SUMMER >> from 254

Her shelves offer everything from Meyer Lemon Marmalade, penny candy, and balsa-wood gliders to reprints of an antique pamphlet entitled *How to Kiss*. The other big draw is her breakfasts and lunches where the menu varies, but often includes such inspirations as Buttermilk Sundried-Cherry Scones, Carrot-Toasted Pumpkin Seed Muffins, or Peanut Butter Sandwiches with Hot Pepper Jam and Apple-Smoked Bacon. >> on 258

Tempting drinks served from an antique tray (above) let Carrie's



Fruit Wands

Recipe begins on page 270



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When it comes time to add glamour to the party scene, Carrie's secret is to use what's on hand, rather than go on a buying spree. Her platters are decorated with basil and mint from the herb bed, her tables with hollyhocks and Shasta daisies from the garden. Treasures, such as a cut-glass deviled egg dish, have been in the family for three generations.

She also puts thought into the interaction of food and tableware. For instance, for the Green Goddess Dip, she arranges the vegetable dippers in vases, transforming them into a sculptural centerpiece.

"It can be simple, but there's always >> on 260

Using a palette of summer pinks and greens both in the Fruit Wands (above) and the decorations (left) pulls the look of the party together.

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MORE ABOUT WARM WEATHER ENTERTAINING
www.bhg.com/summerfood

something funny; fortune-telling fish, postcard place cards, or even just having everything orderly and neatly presented," she says. "I try to make sure that the table looks appealing and in some way whimsical, to show that there's been care that's gone into the staging of what I have to offer."

To keep guests at the table, Carrie continues the festivities by serving yummy surprises after the dishes are cleared: little clusters of frozen grapes, nuts in the shell to crack, exotic teas, wines.

"The little things that keep you lingering and talking," she says. "You don't have to have beautiful props; you have to have something to keep your guests there. It's about the bonding and laughing and spending time together."

Her friends insist that dinner in the garden is such a memorable event because of Carrie and the way she pays attention to the smallest details.

"When people are with Carrie," says Kitty Cowles, a longtime friend, "I feel like everyone is a little happier, a little prettier, a little bit more themselves."

Learn more about Carrie's store at www.jimtown.com.

Green Goddess Dip

START TO FINISH: 30 MINUTES

- 1/3 cup refrigerated or frozen egg product, thawed
- 3 Tbsp. lemon juice
- 2 tsp. Dijon-style mustard
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 cup canola oil
- 4 to 5 anchovy fillets, drained and chopped (1 tablespoon)
- 1 cup loosely packed fresh parsley leaves
- 1/4 cup loosely packed fresh tarragon leaves
- 1/4 cup snipped fresh chives
- 2 green onions, chopped

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COOK'S SHOP SERVING ESSENTIALS

Handles make this rectangular platter convenient for passing snacks and serving guests at a cookout or party. White ceramic; measures 17 3/4 x 13 inches. **AB81173 \$34.95**. Ceramic bowls with fluted edges available in blue or white: **AB81064 Blue, Set of four \$39.95** or **AB81065 White, Set of four \$39.95**. Stainless Scoop Spoons, Set of eight **AB81066 \$23.95**.

TO ORDER Call 800/881-4066 or visit our site on the internet at www.bhg.com/cookshop. Please specify stock numbers. A charge for shipping, handling, and sales tax, if applicable, will be added to the prices shown.

