



GIRLS' NIGHT

By Rebecca Lang

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Good drinks, juicy gossip, and great food are the ingredients for a night of fun with the girls. Women getting together to relax without their significant others is a tradition that spans generations. I remember my grandmother who, even in her 80s, had her friends over to make homemade wine and visit. I was never invited to these gatherings, so I can't go into too much detail about what kind of wine or how much fun those seniors had, but I can only imagine. Nowadays, my mom is a member of the Red Hat Ladies, where time with "just the girls" is a requirement.

The older I become, the more I feel the need to relax with my girlfriends. When we're together, we can talk as we like and about what we like. Since I enjoy having my friends over for appetizers and mixed drinks so much, I started teaching cooking classes on the subject two years ago at The Cook's Warehouse. I have taught almost 10 of these classes, and there wasn't a single one that didn't sell out. Friends from all age groups come to enjoy some time with the girls. The classes tend to start out pretty quiet, but after the first drink is served, the real fun begins.



In these classes, I always demonstrate three recipes and two cocktails, all of which are sampled by the class. The recipes are similar to the ones that I use at my own parties. The easy and fun dishes all follow a few basics that make that party enjoyable for everyone. I focus on the concept of grazing instead of a sit-down meal. When I only have a limited amount of time to catch up with the girls, I've got to eat, drink, and keep moving. Planning foods that are easily eaten without utensils is a must as well – who wants to fuss with silverware while you're relaxing on the couch? It's also important to keep in mind that with laundry and other fun family chores to do when they get home, your friends will probably need this food to serve as a light dinner, too, so plan for appetizers that are filling but fun.



My favorite part of a night in with the girls is the drinks. I drink wine most of the time, so mixing exciting cocktails is quite an event at my house, and puts that fancy bar set we got as a wedding gift to good use. Just as with the food, there are a couple of choices that work well when serving drinks to your friends. You might want to choose one drink, make a batch that fits in a pitcher, and let the girls replenish their own glasses. Or, you can simply arrange all the drink ingredients and write up a recipe to follow, then let guests mix the drinks themselves. Using a self-serve bar can be loads of fun, and you just might see some strange concoctions towards the end of the evening.



Boysenberry Bubbly

Yield: 8 servings

1/2 cup blackberry Schnapps
750 ml bottle sparkling wine or Champagne
boysenberry sorbet
(may substitute raspberry sorbet)

Pour 1 tablespoon blackberry Schnapps each in the bottom of 8 champagne glasses. Top with Champagne, leaving at least a 1-inch rim at the top of the glass. Using a melon baller or small scoop, drop one small ball of sorbet in each glass. The Champagne will fizz with the sorbet.

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Mojitini

Yield: 4 servings

1/2 cup sugar
1/2 cup water
1/4 cup fresh mint leaves
1/2 cup vodka
1 cup ice
1 lime, quartered

Combine sugar, water, and mint leaves in a small saucepan and cook over medium heat until sugar is dissolved. Remove from heat and cool to room temperature.

Combine sugar-mint syrup, vodka, and ice in a cocktail shaker. Shake for 15 seconds.

Pour evenly through a strainer into 4 martini glasses and discard the mint leaves. Squeeze the juice from a lime quarter into each glass and add juiced quarter to glass.

The best part of planning a girls' night is the fact that having an occasion isn't necessary for inviting the girls over. Many groups of friends set aside a night each month to get together. I've found if it's not on the calendar as a regular occurrence, we often forget to plan another party and attendance dwindles quickly. Pick every third Thursday or any time that suits the group. Of course, emergency sessions of girls' night out will always come up. There's every excuse in the book to have one: When a friend gets a surprise promotion, gets dumped by the person she thought she'd be with forever, or even needs help picking a paint color for the dining room. For these last minute occasions, it may be easier to gather everyone at a favorite restaurant or bar instead of having someone cook for the group. (See sidebar for some fun suggestions.) Sometimes, hitting the town can be just as fun as a night in.

No matter how old you are, a girls' night can be fun and relaxing. Enjoying your friends is as easy as making time to see them. Choose a date that works for the group and start planning your recipes. Remember, good food can be great when enjoyed with friends.



Great Places for Girls' Night Out

Eclipse Di Luna

764 Miami Circle
404/846-0449

The Treehouse

7 Kings Circle NE
404/266-2732

La Fonda Latina (several locations)

4427 Roswell Road
404/303-8201

Zócalo

123 East Court Square
404/270-9450
(or Midtown location
404/249-7656)

Great Northern Crostini

Yield: about 30 pieces

1/4 cup sun-dried tomatoes in oil,
drained and oil reserved
1 (15.8-ounce) can Great Northern beans, drained
1 tablespoon fresh rosemary, finely chopped
salt and pepper to taste
1 baguette
1/4 cup olive oil
fresh parsley, chopped

Finely chop sun-dried tomatoes. Combine tomatoes, reserved oil, beans, and rosemary in a medium saucepan over low heat. Cook for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add salt and pepper to taste. Remove from heat and set aside.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Slice baguette into 30 1/4-inch slices. Drizzle slices with olive oil and bake at 350 degrees for 5 minutes, or until browned, turning once.

Spread each slice with 1 teaspoon bean mixture. Sprinkle with chopped parsley.

