

# Consuming Thoughts

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Are you known for making the best lasagna, homemade baked beans or cracker pudding? There's probably a dish or two that your family, friends or relatives think that you can whip up better than most anyone else. But a knack for cooking one or two specialty dishes is not all there is to putting together a meal for a special occasion or a holiday. Making the menu is all important. And that takes time, practice, and above all, careful planning.

When you're planning a menu,

there are several things to consider.

- Preplan your menu before you shop. Make a shopping list, but be flexible enough to take advantage of seasonal specials or weekend buys. While planning your menu, check your recipes and the groceries you have at home.

- Keep your cooking utensils and appliances in mind. Two or more dishes that require baking at different temperatures won't always work in a one-oven kitchen.

- Choose the main dish first and then select the other courses to complement it.

- It's wise to save more complicated dishes for the days when you have the time for them. Shorten your preparation time by choosing some recipes which can be partially or totally prepared ahead of time. This leaves you more free time just before the meal.

- Your meal will really stand out from the ordinary if you collect interesting recipes. Make sure that they offer a variety of textures, tastes, colors and shapes. Also, keep in mind that certain qualities to together; crisp goes with soft, bland or sweet with tart or zippy, hot with cold, light with heavy. When you don't have time to prepare a new dish, something as simple as an attractive garnish can help keep the meal from looking routine.

Learning how to organize your meals can save you from those horrible last minute flurries. The

best way to keep things under control is to read through each recipe and make out a work schedule on paper. You can tailor the schedule for any meal if you follow these steps.

- Each dish needs to be assembled before it's ready to be cooked, so estimate the preparation time for each dish. Often the preparation time exceeds the cooking time.

- Check the recipe for the cooking time of each dish.

- Add the preparation time and

cooking time together to determine how long each dish will take. List these starting times in sequence, with the longest time first. Jot down what you will be doing during each time.

- Working backwards from your scheduled serving time, figure when you should start the first dish. You will find that there will be extra time throughout your schedule to take care of miscellaneous tasks.

Careful planning can make your family reunion — or any special occasion — a success.



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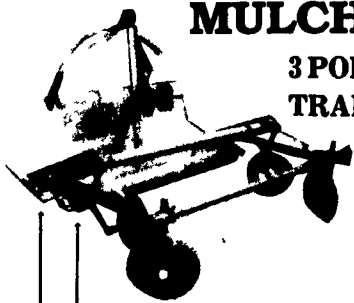
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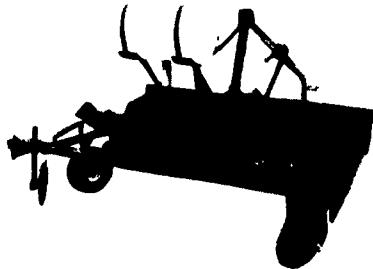
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