

Easter Brunch Served With Style

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LITITZ (Lancaster Co.) — Do you admire all those scrumptious meals photographed in magazines and wish you could duplicate them?

Well, you can. With a few pointers and tips from Judy Mentzer, food stylist, and her assistant Barbara Shenk, home economist, you can provide the picture-perfect brunch for family and guests.

Mentzer has been instrumental in many of the fabulous photos that appear advertising Campbell's Soup, Pfaltzgraff calendars, and advertisements for Four Seasons Hotel and other corporations.

Mentzer and Shenk recently combined their talents to prepare an Easter Brunch that *Lancaster Farming* readers can duplicate.

Start with a tablecloth and a flower arrangement that coordinates with your china.

Shenk selected a white cloth to show off her heirloom Bavarian china. You don't need to spend a fortune for flowers. In this example, primroses in three colors that picked up the pattern from the china were used. Place the potted plants in containers you have around the house. Non-matching containers are trendy and allow originality. Mentzer also selected a birdhouse used as an accessory in another room. The birdhouse added height.

"Different elevations create presentation interest," Mentzer said.

If you are lucky enough to have cut flowers, increase their longevity by using Shenk's homemade Flower Fresh formula: To each quart of water, add 1-2 drops Clorax (to kill bacteria), 1-2 drops lemon juice or 1 aspirin (to keep stems open), and 2 teaspoons sugar (food for the flowers).

Make good food taste even better by presenting it in an eye-appealing style. For example, the coffee cake in the photograph could have easily been placed on a round plate on a cake pedestal. Placing it on a platter allows room for garnishing with mint leaves and fresh flowers.

Here's a hidden tip: Placing the cake on the platter caused it to sag in the middle. The stylists build up the middle of the cake by placing folded paper towels beneath the paper doily. Or, you can use foil covered cardboard cut to fit.

"Improvise," is a requirement for Mentzer who said food stylists must "think on their feet," because of many things that don't turn out as expected.

"No day is the same for a food stylist. Each day is filled with variety and creativity," Shenk said.

Not all food styling done for magazines is suitable for real-life eating. For example, if a piece of cake falls off during a photo shoot, Mentzer may use Crazy glue to restore it or Vaseline to hold in place. Although those tips are never conducive to eating, frosting can work as an edible glue.

There are many different ways to set a buffet, but Mentzer recommends that the large plates be placed at the beginning of the buffet line so that guests can fill their plates as they walk along the table. Do not place serving dishes close to the table edge.



Food stylist Judy Mentzer, right, and assistant Barbara Shenk show how attractive table settings can be arranged by using items from your home and garden. Food is arranged in different heights to add interesting depth to the dessert buffet. A separate table featuring hot items with the main course makes it easier to serve guests.

Allow room for guests to set down their plates when dishing up food.

Arrange food in the order it should be served. Food served on a buffet should not require a lot of cutting.

Place the silverware, napkins, and beverages at the end of the buffet line so that guests don't need to balance so many different items while dishing up at the buffet.

Another tip to dress up a plain-looking coffecake is to place a paper doily on top and sift confectioners' sugar. Remove the doily and the design remains.

To dress up meat dishes, Mentzer often accents them with figs, wedges of orange yams and acorn squash, and green beans. Other favorites are sickle pears, plums, Lady apples, and kale, red-skinned potatoes, Brussels sprouts, sage, tansy, and other in-season herbs. Serve unpeeled, steamed apple slice with boneless pork chops and savory cabbage leaves.

Mentzer, a home economist, attained experience working in Campbell's Soup test kitchens. She attends conferences for culinary professionals where well-known chefs such as Julia Child teach.

Most food pictures are done in photography studios with special lighting set up for food displays.

Keeping a buffet simple, not complicated, but delicious and eye-appealing is the goal.

Here are the recipes for the brunch menu Shenk and Mentzer recommend: Citrus Eye Opener Punch, Baked Ham, Breakfast Casserole, Creamy Potato Casserole, Sour Cream Coffee Cake, Sticky Buns, and assorted coffees and teas. A bowl of fresh fruit adds nutrition and eye appeal.

BREAKFAST CASSEROLE

1 pound bacon
6 eggs
2 cups milk
1 teaspoon dry mustard
1½ cups shredded cheddar cheese
1 teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon pepper
6 slices bread

Brown bacon. Drain, cool, and break into bite-sized pieces. Beat eggs and milk. Stir in bacon and remaining ingredients except bread. Pour into rectangular 9X13X2-inch pan. Tear bread into bite-sized pieces. Stir into egg mixture. Cover with foil and refrigerate overnight. Bake in an unpreheated 350 degree oven for 55 minutes.

GOURMET CHEESE POTATOES

9 medium potatoes
2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
¼ cup butter
1½ cup sour cream (or one cup milk)
¼ cup finely-chopped onion
1 teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon pepper
2 tablespoons butter
paprika

Cook potatoes in skin. Cool slightly and peel using a paring knife. Shred coarsely on a four-sided grater.

In saucepan, over low heat, combine ¼ cup butter and shredded cheese. Stir until melted.

Remove from heat. Blend in onion, sour cream, and seasonings. Fold into potatoes and put in greased 13X9X2-inch casserole pan. Dot with two tablespoons butter. Sprinkle with paprika.

Bake in 350-degree oven, 30 minutes or until heated thoroughly.

Casserole may be prepared a

day before and refrigerated. Sprinkle with paprika just before baking.

CREAMY POTATO CASSEROLE

9 medium baking potatoes (or equivalent amount of frozen shredded potatoes)
1 stick butter
1½ cups sour cream
4 chopped green onions
1½ teaspoons salt
¼ teaspoon pepper
green onion fan

Cover potatoes with salted water and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and cook about 30 minutes or until tender. Cool slightly; peel and coarsely shred potatoes.

Combine potatoes and next five ingredients; stir well. Spoon potato mixture into a greased 9X13X2 inch casserole pan. Cover and bake at 350 degrees for 20 minutes. Garnish with green onion fan. Yield: 10 servings.

CITRUS EYE-OPENER

12-ounce can frozen orange juice concentrate
6-ounce can frozen lemonade concentrate
1½ cups cold water
1-liter bottle carbonated water, chilled
ice cubes
orange slices, halved (optional)

In a large container combine orange juice concentrate, lemonade concentrate, and water. Just before serving, slowly add carbonated water. Stir gently to mix. Serve over ice cubes. Garnish with orange slice halves if desired. Makes eight seven- to eight-ounce servings.

STICKY BUNS

2 loaves frozen bread dough
1 cup brown sugar
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1 stick butter

2 tablespoons milk
4.6 ounce cook-and-serve vanilla pudding mix

Melt together in microwave oven the brown sugar, cinnamon, butter, milk, and vanilla pudding.

Spray 2 round cake pans with cooking spray. Tear loaves into small pieces and pour sauce over dough. Let rise overnight in refrigerator or one hour in warm, draft-free place. Bake at 350 degrees for 25 minutes. Turn upside down on a platter.

SOUR CREAM COFFEE CAKE

Topping:
1 cup sugar
2 tablespoons cinnamon
3 tablespoons coconut
Mix together in a small bowl and set aside.

Batter:
1 cup butter
2 cups sugar
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
4 eggs

Cream butter, sugar, vanilla and salt. Add eggs one at a time and continue to cream the mixture until light and fluffy.

Sift together:
3 cups flour
2 teaspoons baking soda
Add flour mixture and two cups sour cream alternately to the batter.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour a 13X9X2 or two eight- or nine-inch pans.

Put one fourth of the batter in a 13X9X2-inch or each round pan; top with one-fourth of the topping mixture.

Continue to layer batter and topping, ending with the topping mixture. Cut through the batter (swirling) using a table knife.

Bake at 350 degrees for one hour or until an inserted toothpick comes out clean. Cool on cooling rack. Freeze one or eat all of it.