

Simply Healthy Appetizer Ideas for Hosting Gluten-Free and Dairy-Free Guests

The holidays are here, which means swarms of social events, tables filled with food, and a variety of palates to cater to. With each passing year, more and more people are dreading this holiday smorgasbord, as special diets seem to be moving closer to the norm than the exception. While very few guests would want you to rearrange your entire menu for their personal needs, a few tasty offerings that everyone can eat will be appreciated more than you might think. Contrary to popular belief, catering to special diet or two need not be difficult. Here are a few easy shortcuts:

- Ask the guest to bring a favorite dish or two. They may not feel comfortable showing up with food unannounced. So, be honest with them and let them co-host a few items.
- Ask the guest for suggestions. If you really want to cater to all guests, but have a lack of ideas, give them a call and ask for a few menu ideas.
- Make that little extra effort and customize a few favorites. If you have little experience in special diets, don't try to tackle gluten-free breads overnight or take a stab at dairy-free cheese. But, if your favorite recipe merely calls for a few tablespoons of flour, try using alternative gluten-free flour, such as rice flour. In such small amounts, it should have little effect on the delicious outcome. If the only problem is milk, non-dairy alternatives can be used at almost every occasion. Just pick up an aseptic package of soy, rice, or almond milk for a couple of bucks at most markets. For butter, sub in a dairy-free margarine (trans fat free of course, such as Earth Balance), or opt to replace the fat with a heart-healthy oil.
- Don't hide the box. Keep in mind that pre-packaged items from bread to mustard can contain a myriad of strange ingredients. Rather than fussing, just keep the original packages handy so that your guest may request to peruse the ingredients.
- Think basic. Last but certainly not least, turn to dishes that naturally meet your guests' needs for an effortless "free-from" dish or two: Dips

This selection of easy to make dips will suit most guests, from the food allergic to vegans and vegetarians…
 Hummus ‐ Rich with garbanzos and sesame, this flavorful and versatile dip is nutritious and delicious. Plus, with so many varieties to choose from, how can you go wrong?

Guacamole ‐ Skip the sour cream and opt for an avocado and salsa type guacamole that will bring smiles to so many faces.

Tapanades ‐ An Olive or Sun-Dried Tomato Tapanade will add a touch of elegance to your appetizer table.

White Bean Spread - Beans may not sound elegant enough, but when paired with a little rosemary, they are truly holiday-worthy. For Dipping

Bread is obviously a problem for gluten-free guests, and surprisingly, many bread products harbor milk in various forms. If you don't have time to procure just the right bread, stick with the basics…

Chips ‐ These may not be the healthiest option, but many brands of plain potato chips and tortilla chips are safe for gluten-free, dairy-free diets. Be sure to ask the guest to recommend a brand, or let them supply the chips!

Vegetables ‐ An assortment of vegetables, including carrot sticks, celery, cherry tomatoes, sliced bell pepper, and … the list goes on … will be appreciated by all guests who can already feel those holiday pounds creeping on. For Snacking

Cocktail Style Seafood ‐ Unless you have a shellfish allergic guest arriving, simply prepared prawns and crab can be excellent and healthy finger food. Though I would always ask the guest for recommendations, cocktail sauce can on occasion harbor gluten, so ask your guest for a recommendation, or make it homemade with a basic recipe and even a simple healthy ketchup …

Fresh Fruit ‐ Melon balls, pineapple slices, orange wedges, and other palate cleansing bites are a must for any holiday table.

Prosciutto Mellon Balls ‐ Dress up that fruit with this delicious classic.

Nuts ‐ A bowl of nuts for cracking always brings holiday fun, but some homemade sugar pecans or other spiced nuts, will also be a tasty treat.

For more wonderful recipes and ideas, see the following:

Tips and Recipes for Delicious Safe Free Of Holidays
 Gluten-Free Dairy-Free Holiday Tips

Photo Credit: Karina's Kitchen, the Gluten-Free Goddess herself