

A Family Fourth of July Celebration



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Independence Day, of course, celebrates the birth of the United States of America. Founded July 4th 1776, with the signing of the Declaration of Independence, America is celebrating its 231st birthday this year (2007).

Whether you travel across the country to celebrate our nation's birthday or prefer to stay in your own backyard, there are a variety of ways to make this family-friendly holiday special.

All that is needed for a fantastic Fourth are three key ingredients:

1. A Plan
2. Preparation
3. Enthusiasm.

We'll provide the plan to get you started!

Ready?

Let's get going!

Christine Steendahl

"The Menu Mom"

Menu Planning Central

Let me help you plan your meals and show you how simple it can be to get a delicious home cooked meal on the table any night of the week.

Grab your FREE Menu Planning Basics report at www.MenuPlanningCentral.com – then watch for a great meal planning package offer.

Hosting a Family Friendly Fourth of July Party in Your Back Yard

Unless you have a very large back yard, your best bet is to keep your guest list to less than 30 people. Pot luck picnics are by far the easiest. This leaves you time to add unique and festive touches to the event. Ask guests to bring a side dish, and you can take care of the main course, drinks, and dessert. Along with the party planning, these three courses are enough to keep your hands full.

Traditional Fourth of July celebrations usually include hamburgers and hotdogs on the grill. This is a fine tradition, and worthy of continuing. You can dress up the burgers by adding unique condiments, grilling chicken, and offering whole wheat or specialty buns.

If, however, you're looking for an easy but unique alternative to the traditional burgers and hotdogs routine, look no further than kebabs. Grilled kebabs can be prepared in advance and they offer your guests an alternative to the standard fare.

Here's a great recipe you might want to try:

Grilled Holiday Kebabs

- 1 lb Chicken breast cut into 1 inch cubes
 - 1 lb beef cut into 1 inch cubes
 - Three red peppers
 - Three green peppers
 - Cherry Tomatoes
 - 3 onions
 - 2 cups large button mushrooms
 - 2 zucchini, yellow or green
 - 1 large bottle of your favorite Italian dressing.
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- Place cut chicken into large sealable bag. Place beef into separate large sealable bag. Pour ½ cup of Italian dressing into each bag, seal, and marinate for at least 1 hour in refrigerator.

- Cut all vegetables, excluding cherry tomatoes, into 1 to 2 inch pieces. After meat has marinated, place meat and veggies on skewers as you prefer. (Note—if you're using wooden skewers be sure to soak them in water for 20 minutes before you place the meat and veggies on them. This will prevent the wood from burning on the grill.)
- Store kebabs in an airtight container until you're ready to grill. Grill on a medium heat until meat is done.

Now that the main course is taken care of you can focus on the beverages and dessert.

Traditional beverages include ice tea, lemonade, and a cooler full of your favorite carbonated beverages. If you're looking to add a nice touch, consider using ice rings and offering lemon wraps (wedges of lemon wrapped in 4 ½ in square of cheesecloth and tied off) for the ice tea. Also consider offering this wonderful, tasty, and family friendly punch.

Fourth of July Punch

- 40 oz grape juice
- 40 oz pineapple juice
- 2 liter of favorite lemon lime soda
- 2 oranges sliced thin to float on top
- 2 limes sliced thin to float on top

Mix all ingredients together in a large container.

Makes 8-9 quarts of punch.

With the kids running around and playing, they are bound to be ready for a snack or treat before dinner is ready. Here are some patriotic snack ideas that are as much fun to make as they are to eat.

4th of July Fruit Kabobs

- Bananas
- Strawberries
- Large Fresh Blueberries
- Kabob Skewers

Slice bananas into large chunks.
Alternate fruit on skewers
Serve immediately

Pretzel Sparklers

- Long rod pretzels
- White chocolate, melted
- Sprinkles (red, white and blue) or star cake decorations

Melt the white chocolate. Dip the pretzel rod halfway into the melted chocolate then sprinkle the sprinkles over the wet chocolate. Lay on waxed paper or place in a cup to dry.

Dessert time can be time to get the children involved in the festivities by making Popsicle rockets. It's easy, virtually foolproof, and your children will be proud of their tasty accomplishment.

Popsicle Rockets

Here's what you need to get started: red juice, blue juice and white juice.

Red is easy, blue can be blue Gatorade or Kool aid, and white juice can be lemonade.

You'll also need two dozen 3oz paper cups and two dozen Popsicle sticks.

- Begin by having your children mix up the juice if need be.
- Pour two tablespoons of the red juice into the bottom of each cup and place in the freezer for 2-3 hours.
- Remove from freezer add two tablespoons of the white juice and place Popsicle sticks into the center of each cup. Take care when pushing the sticks into the mostly frozen red juice. Children can get enthusiastic and push the sticks all the way through the cup.

- Place back into the freezer for another 2-3 hours. Pull out and top with white juice.
- Refreeze until hard. Peel off paper cups and serve when ready!

Of course no party is complete without festive activities. Before the fireworks get started, and while the adults are busy socializing, you can keep the children busy making 4th of July spinners.

If possible, recruit an older child or teenager to help with this project. This will leave you free to socialize with your guests and enjoy your party.

Craft materials:

- Plastic coffee lids, (red, white, and blue colors). You'll need one for each child and a few to spare in case accidents occur.
- Pens
- Scissors
- String

Step 1. Have children poke a hole in the center of their lid.

Step 2. Using a pen, have each child draw a spiral on their lid starting at the center and working their way to the outer edge. Ideally the spiral should be about ½ inch wide.

Step 3. Have the children cut along the spiral, starting at the outside edge is easier. Be careful not to cut through the hole in the center.

Step 4. Loop the string through the center hole, knot the string, and hang the spinners from a tree or window.

Optional step: If coffee can lids are not an option, you can use colored paper plates.

Additionally you can have the children decorate the lids or plates with glitter, stickers, colored glue. Just let your imagination fly.

When night falls, children and adults will invariably want to enjoy a fireworks show. Please follow these guidelines for a safe and happy Fourth of July.

- Only use fireworks and sparklers outdoors.
- Only children 12 and up should handle sparklers.
- Keep several buckets of water available for extinguishing sparklers.
- Obey local firework laws. Some states ban fireworks outright, or during a drought.
- Light only 1 firework at a time.
- Let fireworks soak for 15-20 minutes before disposal.
- Always wear eye protection.
- Alcohol and fireworks don't mix. Designate a fireworks lighter!
- Adult supervision is a must.



Spicing Up a Simple Family Fourth of July Picnic

Sometimes the best way to spend a Fourth of July, is with your own family. No guests, no parties, just you and your loved ones. The following are a few tips to make your Fourth of July family picnic the best one ever.

It is always good to have a picnic “emergency kit.” A good kit will contain extra paper plates, utensils, wipes, and a plastic table cloth. Additionally, it should have sunscreen and bug repellent, band aids, matches, and trash bags. Pack a Frisbee or ball for entertainment emergencies.

To spice up the menu try cooking chicken burgers using the following recipe.

Fourth of July Chicken Burgers

1 lb ground chicken

2 cups of bread crumbs

½ cup of milk

2 tbs minced onion

1/8 tsp cayenne pepper. You can add more if your family likes it spicy.

Combine all ingredients in a bowl. Form patties and grill until done. Whole wheat buns, provolone cheese and sliced tomatoes make this burger extra special.

Red White and Blue Potato Salad makes for a side dish. Try this recipe, but be sure to keep the salad in a cooler right until it is time to eat, since the recipe uses mayonnaise.

Red White and Blue Potato Salad

4 Servings

- 1-2 slices of bacon or pancetta (optional)
- 3 tablespoons mayonnaise, or more if needed
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard, or more to taste
- 1 tablespoon tarragon vinegar or distilled white vinegar, or more to taste
- 1 tablespoon capers with their juices

- 2 scallions, both white and green parts, trimmed, finely chopped (set aside 2 tablespoons scallion greens for garnish)
- 1 1/2 pounds red, white, and Peruvian blue fingerling potatoes
- 1 1/2 tablespoons olive oil
- Plenty of coarse salt (kosher or sea) and freshly ground black pepper

You'll also need:

1 cup wood chips or chunks (preferably hickory or oak), soaked for 1 hour in water to cover, then drained

An aluminum foil drip pan large enough to hold the potatoes

1. Cut the bacon, if using, into 1/4" slivers, put it in a small nonstick frying pan, and cook over medium heat until lightly browned and the fat is rendered, 3 to 4 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the cooked bacon to paper towels to drain.
2. Make the salad dressing: Place the mayonnaise, mustard, vinegar, capers, scallions, and bacon, if using, in a large nonreactive serving bowl and whisk to mix. Set the salad dressing aside.
3. Scrub the potatoes with a brush, but leave the skins on. Place the potatoes in an aluminum foil drip pan. Drizzle with the olive oil and season very generously with salt and pepper. Toss the potatoes to mix.
4. Set up the grill for indirect grilling and preheat to medium-high. If using a gas grill, place all the wood chips or chunks in the smoker box or in a smoker pouch and preheat on high until you see smoke, then reduce the heat to medium-high.
5. When ready to cook, if using a charcoal grill, toss all the wood chips or chunks on the coals. Place the pan with the potatoes in the center of the hot grate, away from the heat. Cover the grill and cook the potatoes until tender, about 40 minutes. To test for doneness, insert a metal skewer into a potato; it should pierce it easily. Remove the pan with the potatoes from the grill and let cool.
6. Cut any large potatoes in quarters; cut medium size potatoes in half. Leave small potatoes whole. Add the potatoes to the salad dressing and toss to mix. Taste for seasoning, adding salt, mustard, or vinegar as necessary; the salad should be highly seasoned. If the salad is too dry, add a little more mayonnaise. Sprinkle with the reserved salad greens and serve at once.

Involve the children in dessert time. Invite them to make this wonderful red, white, and blue trifle.

Red White and Blue Trifle.

1 box white cake mix

2 packets of vanilla pudding

1 pound of strawberries, fresh or frozen

1 pound of blueberries, fresh or frozen

1 ½ cup of heavy cream, whipped.

- Make cake and pudding by directions on the box.
- Thaw fruit if frozen. If fruit isn't frozen, slice into bite sized pieces and add a tsp of sugar to make juices flow.
- Cut white cake into large chunks.
- Using a large clear dish, place a layer of cake chunks onto the bottom of the container.
- Top with a layer of strawberries
- Top with a layer of pudding
- Top with a layer of cake chunks
- Top with a layer of blueberries
- Top with a layer of pudding
- Continue layering until you reach the top of your container then top with whipped cream.

Or, try one of these yummy dessert ideas:

Flag Cake

- 1 package white cake mix
- 1 8-ounce container frozen whipped topping (thawed)
- 1 pint blueberries rinsed and drained
- 2 pints strawberries rinsed and sliced

1. Prepare cake according to package directions and bake in a 9x13 inch pan. Cool completely.

Frost cake with whipped topping. Place blueberries in a square in the top left corner, and arrange sliced strawberries as stripes to make an American flag. Chill until serving.

Red, White & Blueberry Pie

Makes 8 servings

- 4 squares (1 ounce each) white baking chocolate
- 8 large fresh strawberries halved lengthwise
- 1 reduced fat graham cracker pie crust
- 3/4 cup sliced fresh strawberries
- 1 8-ounce package reduced fat cream cheese cubed
- 3/4 cup confectioners' sugar
- 3/4 cup fat free milk
- 1 3 1/2-ounce box instant vanilla pudding
- 1 cup fresh or frozen blueberries
- 1 cup reduced fat whipped topping

1. In a microwave or heavy saucepan, melt white chocolate, stir until smooth. Dip the 8 halved strawberries halfway in the chocolate. Place cut side down on a waxed paper-lined baking sheet. Refrigerate for 15 minutes or until set. Spread the remaining melted chocolate over the bottom and sides of crust. Arrange sliced strawberries in crust.

2. In a mixing bowl, beat cream cheese and confectioners' sugar until smooth. Gradually add milk, mix well. Beat in pudding mix on low speed for 2 minutes or until thickened. Spread evenly over sliced strawberries.

Place blueberries in center of pie. Arrange dipped strawberries around the edge. Pipe or dollop whipped topping between the strawberries and blueberries. Refrigerate until serving.

Red, White and Blueberry Cheesecake

- 8 sheets (about 13" x14" each) thawed frozen phyllo dough (find it in the freezer section of the supermarket)
- 1/4 cup melted butter or margarine
- 16 oz. cream cheese
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 2 eggs
- 2 cups fresh blueberries, divided
- 1/2 cup strawberry jelly
- 1 cup whipped cream or non-dairy whipped topping (optional)

Preheat oven to 425°.F.

For Crust

Grease a 9" pie plate. Set aside.

On a flat surface place 1 sheet phyllo (keep remaining phyllo covered to prevent drying out), brush with melted butter. Top with another phyllo sheet, continue to make 8 layers, brushing butter between each layer. Using kitchen scissors or a sharp knife, cut the layers into one 12-13 inch circle. Carefully press circle into the prepared pie plate, gently fan edges. Bake until edges are just golden, about 6-8 minutes. Cool slightly on a wire rack. Reduce oven temperature to 350°F.

In a medium bowl beat cream cheese, vanilla and sugar with an electric mixer until light and fluffy. Add eggs and beat until well combined. Fold in 1 cup of the blueberries. Pour mixture into prepared crust. Bake until set, about 40-50 minutes. To prevent over browning of crust, gently cover with aluminum foil during the last 25 minutes of baking. Cool completely on a rack.

To Serve

In a small bowl, beat jelly until smooth. Spread over cheese filling. Arrange remaining blueberries on top in star shape. Garnish with whipped cream, if desired.

The great thing about this dish is that it's virtually foolproof and it will look amazing no matter who handles the job, your two year old or your twenty year old.

Stress-Free Fourth of July Party

Hot dogs, hamburgers, tender ribs dripping with sauce; a barbecue on the Fourth of July signals the beginning of summer. However, having the first outdoor party of the year can have its stressors. How can you have a stress-free Fourth of July party? Here are some tips, which will make your barbecue a success.

You can plan now by purchasing red, white, and blue paper napkins, paper plates, flatware, a tablecloth, and cups. You may wish to buy streamers, balloons, and party hats, as well. Pick up some decorative invitations and sparklers, if available. Check the barbecue to ensure it's clean and ready for use. You'll need charcoal, too. If it's a gas barbecue, make sure the tank is full. See to it that your backyard is prepared as well, especially if you have a patio area. You may also want to clean the patio furniture.

Decide on the menu. Make a list of what you'll need. Call friends and family you'll be inviting to the party and ask them if they would like to bring a special dish. Write down everyone's contribution. Once you have the menu set, you can then decide on the dessert. Perhaps a flag sheet cake, adorned with sparklers, would be ideal for the occasion. You can either bake the cake yourself or order it from a bakery.



Write out the invitations. Have them ready to send. You may want to include a little note asking everyone to wear red, white, and blue outfits. Add an RSVP, with a caveat, asking what dish they will bring. Since you've probably had a celebration the year before, you can estimate how many people will be coming. By the way, don't forget the camera!

The day before the party, you can prepare all of the side dishes (at least those that people aren't bringing) and have them ready. Have the hot dogs, hamburgers, and ribs ready to go. Have your family help to decorate your backyard with streamers and balloons. Set up a buffet table so you can utilize it for drinks, sodas, and all of the paper products.

On the Fourth of July, you wake up to find it's a gorgeous day! You are feeling great, calm, and ready to celebrate! Have your spouse set up the barbecue so that as soon as the guests arrive, the coals are nice and hot. This is one stress-free Fourth of July party you'll always remember.



Heading Out of Town for the Fourth of July

While staying at home can be a wonderful and relaxed way to spend your holiday, several cities across the United States host top-notch Fourth of July Celebrations.

Step into our country's heritage by visiting the following cities for their Fourth of July festivities:

Boston—Boston hosts “America’s Biggest Independence Day Party” on the Esplanade with the fireworks on the bank of the Charles River. The festivities begin on July 3rd with a Boston Pops concert and wrap up with a flyover by the Vermont National Air Guard and a spectacular fireworks show. Food, fun and fireworks, the festivities are free and you can expect to share the event with approximately 500,000 people.

Washington D.C.—There may be no better place to witness a Fourth of July spectacular than on the mall in Washington D.C. Your family can enjoy an Independence Day parade complete with floats, marching bands and giant helium balloons.

A reading of the declaration of independence can be witnessed on the Constitution avenue steps where you can meet historical figures like Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin and you can witness the signing of the declaration of independence. Take your family to the Smithsonian for more educational fun, and don't forget to save time for the evening concert and fireworks show.



Colonial Williamsburg—Jump back in time and visit living history as it was made. Actors walking the streets and residing in historic houses, bring to life the American Revolution. Give your children the opportunity to meet Thomas Jefferson, see how and where he lived, and view a reenactment of the signing of the declaration of independence. In addition to the military reenactment, children’s activities are provided on the palace green. Music will fill the air all day long with a variety of concerts. The fabulous holiday ends with a fireworks display.

Other wonderful places to consider visiting are:

- Walt Disney World., Orlando Florida. While Disney offers fireworks every night of the year, the Fourth of July fireworks are among the best in the country.
- Austin, TX. The Austin Symphony Orchestra makes this trip worth the effort.
- San Francisco. Pier 39 is the place you want to be during the Fourth of July celebration.
- And New York City for hot dog eating contests and Macy’s Fourth of July fireworks show.

Whether you travel out of town, choose to stay home, or host a fantastic party, the best holidays are well thought out and planned ahead of time. Smooth and seamless planning makes for smooth and happy holiday celebrations. No matter where you go or what you do this Fourth of July, spending time with your family will make the time special. Be safe and have fun!

Recommended Resource:

Yes, you can cook a wholesome meal for your family any night of the week. Stop eating fast food and get the pizza delivery guy off the speed dial. All you need is a little menu planning help.

Choose from 3 different types of menus with plenty of recipes each month to please everyone in the family. Our menus and categorized shopping lists make it easy. But that’s not all...

As a member of [Menu Planning Central](#), you will also have access to a group of experts that are available to share great tips on anything from cooking with the kids to table manners. And Christine, “The Menu Mom”, is there to answer questions as well.

Each month you will also get additional resources including ideas to plan breakfast and lunch, throwing a great dinner party and you get to explore a different cooking style or cuisine.

Start by grabbing your free Menu Planning Basics guide at www.MenuPlanningCentral.com and watch for an incredible offer to get access to Menu Planning Central.