



Farm Potluck: How to Be a Great Guest

Earning a reputation as a great potluck guest delivers perks: You'll never be lacking in potluck invites

(From Plan a Potluck: Simple, Social Fun on the Farm, by Lisa Kivirist)

Here is a dash of tips to be a grand guest: Minimize last-minute prep Try to keep out of the host's kitchen by doing as much prep work at home as possible. Slice and prep vegetables for a salad ahead of time and transport produce in containers, tossing ingredients together tableside right before serving. Fresh herbs add a colorful garnish and easily transport in small, plastic bags.

Know your audience Bring a dish that suits the majority of folks attending the potluck—and a dish that's easy to eat. If your group has gourmet leanings, feel free to experiment with your latest unique, ethnic recipes. For potlucks with lots of kids, a classic casserole of macaroni and cheese will ensure everyone leaves satisfied. A word of caution: Leave the soup at home unless you're providing bowls and spoons for the crowd.

Keep food safe Keep hot food hot and cold food cold, as food at unsafe temperature promotes bacteria growth. Depending on how far you need to travel, wrap hot food in foil and layers of clean towels and place in a box for easy carrying. Cold food needs to be kept below 40 degrees F. Pack a well-insulated cooler with plenty of ice or ice blocks and keep in an air-conditioned car while driving during summer months, not in the hot trunk.

Label serving items To make sure all your serving gear gets returned, stick on return address labels and cover with clear packing tape so the labels don't dissolve when washed, or use a permanent marker.

Remember your host Often amidst the fun flurry of a potluck party, the host family misses out on sampling the food. Pack a generous serving of your dish in a Tupperware container and place it in the host's refrigerator with a note: "For you to enjoy when things quiet down!" Create a food station Go beyond just bringing a dish and create a "food station," where you bring both food and cooking gear. Or set up a spot where you cook on-site. Pancakes cooked on an electric fry pan prove to be a novel addition to a potluck meal and give you an opportunity to chat with guests as you flip. Check with the hosts ahead of time to make sure they are OK with the food station idea and that they have space and electrical outlets available. Bring an extension cord, just in case, as well as an assortment of syrups and toppings.

Think beyond food In addition to your potluck dish, think of other things you can share at the event. We like to bring flower arrangements for the buffet table, using clean, old pickle jars for vases so the host doesn't need to worry about returning glassware. During the peak of summer bounty, we brought a bushel of extra zucchini and a pile of recycled shopping bags to a potluck party with a note: "Please take me home!" At the end of the evening, we went home happily empty-handed.