

## EVENT PLANNING FOR FEAST STEWARDS

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Huzzah! You've been asked/chosen/told you're going to be the Kitchen Steward for your group's next event. Now what?

Being asked to cook a feast is first and foremost, a lovely ego-stroke. It means you are trusted by the event steward. Believe me, an event steward, especially for a Kingdom event, needs to be able to trust their chosen Feast Steward implicitly, since the last thing they need to have added to their stress load is trouble in the kitchen. Be worthy of that trust.

Whether it's your first time or your 51<sup>st</sup> time, your next step is to plan what you're going to serve up for feast. This decision has many factors, all of which are important to know before you even open a cookbook.

**Does your event have a theme?** This decision will usually be made by the event staff or hosts (more on them later). If the event has an Imperial Roman theme, you don't want to waste your time researching 14<sup>th</sup> century French dishes. Your feast should fit into the time frame and geographical area selected as the driving theme for the event.

**What if the event *doesn't* have a time period/regional theme?** This happens a lot more often than you think. Without a time period or regional limitation, your planning is sometimes easier. It's up to you to find out if the event is martial (lots of fighting means lots of hungry fighters), or focused on the arts and sciences (less heavy activity means you can go lighter on the menu), or some sort of fun "let's get the group together and revel like it's *not* the 21<sup>st</sup> century" event, which means you don't even have to limit yourself to completely period food.

**What time of year is it?** If your event is going to happen in the winter, you will use an entirely different selection of dishes from a summer event. It's just fact: people don't want to eat a lot of heavy, creamy, hot food in the middle of July. Save the heavy French feasts for events with cooler weather. Midsummer is the time for Mediterranean, Spanish, North

African, and Roman feasts. This is not just for the feasters—you're entitled not to kill yourself in the heat, too.

**What kinds of kitchen facilities are available to you?** This is a biggie! If you have no kitchen, your selections will be limited to those things you *know* you can cook over open fire or on grills. A primitive site with no kitchen facilities is *not* the place to experiment with your fire-cooking skills. Know how many ovens, refrigerators, freezers, and other equipment your kitchen has on hand, and be prepared to make a walk-through a few weeks before the event actually happens to ascertain the working order of all of the equipment.

**How many people are you feeding:** Cooking for 50 is a cake walk for almost any decent home cook. Cooking for 100 takes a little more planning, but still, a good home cook can handle it. Cooking for 150 is a bit more of a challenge, and your planning goes from “okay, I know what I’m doin’,” to “holy moly, I need a plan!” Your menu plan changes drastically if you’re cooking for more than 150 people. Professional caterers will tell you that the break point for them is 200. Remember, they’re pros. Most of us are not.

**How many meals are you responsible for?** This will determine the amount of money per feaster you have to work with per meal. There are many permutations to the meal count, depending on what kind of event it is, but this information will establish your budget.

**Who are your Hosts?** Medieval rules of hospitality were many and varied, depending upon time and geography, but for most of the medieval period, for our purposes, it is rather simple. Your hosts, be they Kings, Barons, Champions or Seneschals, are your “employers”, so to speak, and their needs and desires must be satisfied. They are the ones everyone will be watching, even if the observation is surreptitious. A “host” who doesn’t EAT his feast makes EVERYONE look bad. The host is embarrassed, the feasters will wonder what’s wrong with the food and stop eating, and the cook HAS NOT DONE THEIR JOB!

Your "hosts" MUST sit feast. To not do so is a breach of hospitality. Your "hosts" MUST eat feast. To not do so makes them look bad. These people are trapped at High Table and your job as Feast Steward is to make sure they can and will eat your food. If they can't or won't, then you must ascertain what you CAN cook for them (and them alone) so there is no misunderstanding among the rest of the feasters in the hall. Hosts who don't eat make bad impressions on everyone.

**Who is going to be your Hall Steward?** For a seating of 50, you don't really need a Hall Steward unless there's some sort of theme which requires huge amounts of decoration; a Server Captain will do. With a couple of willing pairs of hands, you can get the hall set up before feast, including drinks. Anything over 50, get a Hall Steward. Ask for a volunteer, and ask *early*! You, your plater, the Hall Steward and Server Captain, if you have one, will need a private conference on Saturday afternoon, so you're all working from the same playbook. Don't skip this step. If you have desires, make them known. If your Hall Steward is new at it, it will take both of you to figure out what will be best. If they are experienced, it's easier, but all of you *must* communicate with each other.

**Who is going to plate your food for service?** Many old timer feast stewards see no need for this to even be asked, let alone answered. I am not one of them, though I am older than Methuselah. By the time I have completed the cooking processes for the feast, I don't want to *see* the food anymore. I don't want to *smell* it. And I certainly don't want to *touch* it. My work is done. I utilize an expediter/plater for all of my feasts. This person will save what little is left of your sanity at crunch time. I prefer to use another experienced feast steward or proven expediter for this job. They know what they're doing, and you can leave them to get it done, once you've had your afternoon conference with them. Plating instructions are always part of my overall kitchen plan, so I don't have to make it up as I go.

**Who is going to run the service itself?** In a small feast, your Hall Steward is likely to be the one to run the service. They will need to know

how the dishes will be plated (servings for 6, or 8, or 10, per platter/bowl/etc.) This is vital info, since the Hall Steward will be instructing the servers later on. In a large feast (75-100), you should really recruit a Server Captain, preferably someone who has been a server several times before. Again, the plating instructions need to be shared with the Server Captain long before the first course goes out. Communication is *key!*

**Who is going to clean the kitchen?** In the old days, rounding up a couple of people to clean up after a small feast was standard operating procedure. With a small feast, it's still possible. But do you really want to stay in that kitchen, after you've been in it all day, to supervise the cleaners? I didn't think so. Arrange for kitchen cleaners way *before* the event. For big Kingdom events, smaller Shires can sometimes be enticed to do this job for a profit-share. There are households out there who can be recruited in advance, with only your leftovers, or a bottle of something alcoholic as a reward. Once you've got a crew leader hired/recruited/shanghaied, the only thing you should have to hang around for is the leftover madness.

**What do I do with my leftovers?** I made this a separate paragraph because it's important. If you've done your feast planning properly, you shouldn't have very much in the way of leftovers. That is the goal for a kitchen plan. But, invariably, you will have some, and it's essential to get them dealt with *before* you leave the kitchen to the cleanup crew. A few guidelines: *do not ever* leave leftovers in camp-owned kitchen equipment. You want *all* of the camp equipment cleaned before the cleanup crew leaves the kitchen. Do you really want to scrape and clean it before you pack out on Sunday morning? Make sure you have provided zip-loc bags and disposable aluminum trays for your leftovers. Decide which dishes get saved, bagged/tinned/wrapped, and which dishes get tossed in the garbage. Do not leave this up to your cleanup crew. *You* are the Feast Steward, *you* make those decisions.

You can now start thinking about the dishes and courses you want to present at the feast.