

PORTION CONTROL

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If you don't have it, you are in trouble before you cook the first dish. Here are my basic "guidelines" for portion-controlling a feast:

Course 1: 4 oz. soup w/2 oz. bread OR 2 oz. of any other food

Course 2: 4 oz. meat protein w/3 oz. vegetables OR 2 oz. grain-based starch (if you must)

Course 3: 3 oz. meat protein, 2 oz. vegetables

Course 4 (and 5 and 6, if you must): ½ oz. salad OR 2 oz. meat protein, 2 oz. vegetables

Dessert: 2 oz. of whatever you've chosen as your "dessert." Since the concept of dessert isn't even close to period much before 1550, this may be moot if you're doing a period feast.

If you add up all the "portions" for all the dishes you plan to serve at the feast, you will discover that, if a feaster eats every portion sent out to him, they will consume somewhere around 1-2 POUNDS of food. That's A LOT of calories! When you think of your feast in this fashion, it becomes very clear that portion control is the single most important part of staying under budget.

How to figure it out: Make a batch (a batch is the as-written, unexpanded version) of your recipe. The directions may say "makes 4 servings" or something along those lines. Weigh it (now is a good time to purchase an accurate food scale, especially if you plan to do this again). Divide the weight by the portion size you have chosen to serve. NOW how many servings does one batch make? That recipe for 4 probably serves twice that many people in a feast setting.

How do you accomplish portion control with our normal family-style feast service? During your recipe tests, weigh out 1 portion. Pick the serving vessel and utensil that best fits that type of food, then visualize what 8 portions will look like. Enter those notes in your plating plan. On feast day, you simply weigh out however many portions are going to each table (usually 6-8), and put them in/on your planned serving vessel. The people at the table are responsible for divvying up the individual portions, and in most cases, will do the right thing.