

# THE KITCHEN PLAN

By

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This class will teach you how to create a kitchen plan for your feast.

## WHAT IS A KITCHEN PLAN?

A kitchen plan is a step-by-step list of what you must do to create the feast experience you want for the people who have paid good money to eat it. The making of a kitchen plan is an exercise in mindful decision-making; your choices during this process are vitally important to the success of your feast.

## CONTENTS OF A KITCHEN PLAN

Menu—make sure to include Travelers' Fare, Breakfast, Lunch, and Feast even if you are not preparing them. Print a copy for your Hall Steward (including any special announcements that go along with each course), one copy for your Plater, and one copy to post OUTSIDE the kitchen. Don't make the mistake of posting your informational menus and ingredients lists inside the kitchen. You do not want to be interrupted while cooking.

Ingredient List—this is a simple listing of every ingredient in each and every dish, along with a note as to whether the dish is sugar-free, gluten-free, meatless, vegan, etc. Print one copy for your kitchen book and one copy to post OUTSIDE the kitchen. If the Reservation Steward will allow it, posting one at Reservations is also a good idea.

Recipes—these are the final recipes you will use, expanded to the proper number of diners. If the recipe works best in batches, note the number of batches you will need for the feast.

Preparation Notes—these are the detailed instructions for each dish. How do you want ingredients prepared? This should include cutting instructions (just how small a dice do you want to ensure timely cooking?), marinating instructions (how long? At room temp or refrigerated?), and anything else you might have to show and tell *someone else* how to do.

Task list—a daily and hourly schedule of what tasks are to be completed when. This is how you will know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, how far ahead or behind you are in your preparations. This is **vital** information for a feast cook.

Plating Instructions—what kind of plate, bowl, or other serving vessel will hold this dish to go to the tables? What kind of serving implements will be needed? How do you want it garnished?

## **WHY DO YOU NEED A KITCHEN PLAN?**

A detailed kitchen plan will *almost* guarantee you don't lose your mind in the kitchen at 3 PM on feast day. Notice, I said almost. Even the best-laid plans can go awry due to circumstances beyond your control. The best way to avoid most of the pitfalls is to create a detailed kitchen plan, and think about how to iron out potential wrinkles as you go. Making a kitchen plan is a MENTAL exercise. You must THINK through each step of your process and look for potential disasters as you go through each recipe and its steps. Visualize!

## **THIS IS HOW I DO MY KITCHEN PLAN**

Step 1: Construct the menu. If you took the menu planning class already, you know how to do this. If you haven't taken the menu planning class, I strongly suggest that you do so BEFORE you tackle a feast.

Step 2: Test ALL the recipes. Make a test batch of each dish so you can determine exactly how many servings (of YOUR size) will come out of one batch. Example: Your soup recipe states that one batch will feed 6 people. Determine how many ounces YOU are going to serve each diner. Measure the number of ounces in one batch. You now know how many of YOUR serving size will come from one batch of the recipe. Make notes as you go through the test. Are there any weird cuts of veggies or meat required? Write it down. How finicky is this to make? If you visualize the entire preparation of the dish for 100 people, how many pitfalls are there? How many extra pairs of hands will you require to create the dish on time? When will you have to start

the processes? How long does it take to accomplish one batch? Multiply that out by the number of batches you need to make, divide by 2, and you'll have a SAFE estimate of the time it will take to completely finish the dish.

Step 3: Do not rely on your phone or a tablet with information in "the cloud". You may not have access to the internet at your site, and the possibility of dropping a \$500 phone in a soup pot is higher than you think. Use a computer and printer! This will be much easier on you, and it will also be handy in case you come down with ptomaine poisoning on Friday night and can't crawl out of your bed to get the feast done. It's happened. Do NOT use index cards or rely on your memory! Print each page and put it in a plastic document sleeve in a notebook. You will not regret doing this. Food stains on paper can obliterate important information. Don't let it happen to you!

Step 4: Type up your final recipes, one recipe to a page. Then take a separate piece of paper (I prefer to scribble these notes, rather than type them, but you can do a side-by-side document in Word and accomplish the same thing), and write down every single step in the process of creating the dish. Example: Scotch Eggs: Mix seasoning into plain ground pork and refrigerate 2 hours; coat eggs with flour; then cover with sausage; then with beaten egg; coat with breadcrumbs; put on sheet pans with parchment underlay and refrigerate for 1 hour; bake at 400 degrees for 30 minutes; test temp for pork doneness.

Step 5: Make a rough outline of your weekend schedule. I start with Friday (or Thursday—inquire about letting a small crew on-site on Thursday afternoon) arriving on site. Make sure you leave a couple of hours to unpack, set up your tent, or bed, and organize your refrigerator and dry storage of ingredients. Example: Arrive on-site at Noon on Friday. Unpack, make the bed (or put up the tent). Block your time so you start prepping at 2PM. Make another block of time for 2PM-5PM. Take time to EAT! Make another block of time for 6PM-9PM. If you are cooking breakfast, you should make sure you're out of the kitchen no later than 9PM and into your bed by 11PM. Breakfast must usually be ready to serve by 7:30AM at the latest, and coffee takes a minimum of 45 minutes to brew by the urnful. Don't stagger into the kitchen at 7AM and expect to be ready to serve at 7:30.

When you are the feast cook, take some advice from me, GO TO BED, not to a party. You can party on other weekends. You are ON THE JOB!

Step 6: Put on your thinking cap! This is where you must visualize your feast preparation from start to finish.

## **THE THINKING PROCESS**

Start with your first dish, and follow the same reasoning process for each dish.

How long did the single batch take to complete? This includes the time it took to prep the ingredients, and the time it took to actually cook. If it took you more than an hour to get it to the heat, you might want to re-think having the dish on the menu. If one batch took 90 minutes, and you have to make 10 batches for your feast, you can figure it will take one person 7.5 hours, 2 people prepping 3.75 hours, 3 people 2.5 hours, and so forth. You must start thinking in MANhours. Also take into consideration that you'll have to take at least a few minutes of your own time to instruct your helpers about EXACTLY what you want them to do.

How do you want your ingredients prepared? When dealing with the volunteers who wish to HELP you make feast, please show them what to do. Don't tell them. If you want the turnips cut in a specific fashion, show them what you want! I can't stress this enough. Feast cooks have lost their minds over volunteers who don't do something right because they weren't SHOWN the right way in the first place. Show them how to prep the ingredient, and then watch them do a little before walking away. This way you'll KNOW they've got the idea, instead of HOPING you don't get screwed. Don't let this happen to you!

What kitchen equipment is necessary to complete the prep? You need to know how many knives, spoons, mixer, food processor, blender, etc. will be necessary to prep the ingredients for the dish. If you know you'll need a blender, make sure you either have one already in the kitchen (not happening in any kitchen in Trimaris that I know of) or be prepared to pack one in.

Are you picky about your personal knives? Make sure you mark them and post instructions regarding cleaning. I use a couple of Damascus hand-forged knives, and they cannot be run through the Hobart, or left to air dry. I found one wet, in a sheath belonging to someone else, on a table, on Sunday morning. Don't let this happen to you!

What cooking method will be used to finish the dish?

Stovetop, oven, convection oven, or crock pot, or even a grill, must be included in your master time block schedule. If you've got to bake ten pies AND roast 4 big hunks o' meat, you have to schedule it so both these things aren't trying to cook in the same equipment at the same time.

What serving gear is going to be required for the dish? If a bowl, you'll need something to dish it out. If a platter, will a pair of tongs do, or do you need a fork, or can it go "tool-less"? If your course has need of two large bowls, a platter, and some sauce bowls, what about your next course? Do you need to wash serving gear between courses? It happens all the time at Kingdom-level feasts, so be prepared with a dish washer DURING the plating/serving process of your feast.

What can I do ahead of time to streamline the process?

Feast cooks are of two minds when it comes to this. Some cooks I know want everything prepared fresh on-site for their feast. I love them, but I think they're nuts. If you have a marinade to prepare and use, it is simply better and more efficient to prepare the marinade at home and transport it in bags or bottles. I am a firm believer in pre-prep of whatever you can do at home the week before your feast, or even, with some things, months ahead. Take bread, for a prime example. If you plan to bake bread on-site for your feast, pre-mix and freeze the dough. If you are making heartier bread, bake it up at home and freeze individual loaves. Save yourself the headache of working a time-consuming chore such as making bread from scratch into your master schedule. The same holds true for anything made with dough of any kind. Make it at home ahead of time, freeze, and transport. If you are making a soup-like substance, make your seasoning blend at

home and put it in a bag, or a jar, or a plastic tub & mark it well. If you need a spice rub, make it ahead. Think through the process of each dish, and you'll be amazed at how much time you can save on feast day by working a little harder during the week before, especially with fiddly little measurements like teaspoons of spices.

What tastes better the second time around? I always ask this question of my dishes. Just about anything cooked in liquid tastes better after a night in the fridge. Spaghetti sauce, beef stew, anything which was braised, a sauce that needs time for the flavors to meld together, all these things need to be made early in your time block schedule so they have that extra time to sit and become even more flavorful.

What dishes meet specific dietary needs? I like to label my dishes on the master menu if they are wheat-free, gluten-free (yes, there is a difference), vegetarian, vegan, or sugar-free. Those are the main dietary restrictions you should be prepared to work a way around. If your dish contains no sugar (or honey), then it is sugar-free. If it contains no wheat, but has barley or oatmeal, it is wheat-free. If it contains no wheat (ancient OR modern), rye, barley, or oatmeal, it is gluten-free. If you're cooking with beer of any kind, it may be wheat-free, but it is not usually gluten-free. If the dish contains eggs, but no meat or meat fats, you can class it as vegetarian. If it contains no animal products AT ALL (including honey), you can call it vegan. If you note your menu with these dietary labels, the populace can then make an informed choice about whether they're going to buy feast or not. If serving lots of meat, make sure your vegetable servings have enough "extra servings" in them so the vegetarians and vegans can fill their bellies. If you have a vegetable soup or stew, don't make it with meat broth. Make it from vegetable broth and you've got another vegetarian/vegan friendly dish. I find that this practice results in much less chance that someone's going to be in your kitchen, in your face, wanting to know why their dietary needs aren't being met when they already bought feast. Let them know early, and your chances of that happening are reduced.

At the end of feast, will the leftovers of this dish be saved, or trashed? Some things can be saved, packaged, and frozen for use at a future event. Some things don't keep worth a darn. Here in An Crosaire, we have farmers who can use leftovers not worth saving to feed farm animals, so make them a care package and they'll be extremely happy. If you have leftover dairy products, be aware of your local group's population. If you've got people with children, dairy products are a good thing to pass on to them if you can't keep them for future use. Hard cheeses freeze well; soft cheeses, not so much. Do some good in your own backyard by giving leftover dribs and drabs to people who NEED them.

Where are my potential wrinkles and what kind of iron do I use to make them disappear if they happen? This is the "what if" phase of the thinking process. What if an oven doesn't work? How can I make the dish happen despite that? Who do I call if the Hobart breaks down, or the ovens? How do I grind things when I forgot my grinder (which, with a well-oiled kitchen plan, you won't)? What if I break my leg on the way home from work on Thursday night? (I can give you the answer to that one... make sure someone else can pick up the kitchen plan, all your ingredients, and can run with it as written... always have a backup feast cook just in case life happens.)

Who will serve as my "pathfinder" cook from 3PM-serving time on feast day? Many people think I'm loony for recommending this, but it has saved my sanity on more than one occasion, so I highly recommend you have an experienced feast cook come to your kitchen at 3PM. Why? In the heat of the last crunch hours of getting your feast to the tables without incident, many people lose sight of the "forest". You know that saying about you can't see the forest for the trees? That's what I'm talking about here. By 3PM on feast day, you've been working your butt off for days. Your brain power will be at a low point by then, and you need someone who can show you the "path" around the "tree" that's in your way. It could be as simple as a directive to sit and breathe, or eat something (which NONE of us want to do, but a little pure protein goes a long way to making

your brain work again... peanut butter or a hard-boiled egg works great!), or a solution to a problem. Make sure they know you well enough to read your face and know when you're in a quandary. Have them ask what you need. Then tell them the dilemma ("tree") you're stuck in front of. Don't hesitate. This is not the time or place for an ego trip.

Who will plate my food? Again, some cooks think I'm crazy for insisting on a separate plater, but it is a job which will take a tired cook head-first into the wall. You're tired, you're dehydrated (even if you drink a gallon of water every two hours, working in a kitchen for three days will dehydrate you), you've been smelling, tasting, and working with this food for days, and the very LAST thing you want to do is fuss over it and make it pretty. "Hire" someone to do that for you. The dumbest thing you can possibly do at this point is try to plate your own food. Let someone else handle that and have a seat and a drink near the serving prep area. You can point and shoot if needed, but don't do the job yourself.

## **THINGS TO REMEMBER ON FEAST WEEKEND!**

**No battle plan survives intact after first contact with the enemy!** Be prepared to adjust your time block schedule and task list ALL THE TIME!

**Hang copies of your task list and schedule on an easily-accessible surface where you can see it, get to it, and adjust it.** When a task is done, mark through it.

**Put up signs for your kitchen help!** Alongside your task list, or at the bottom in big, heavy magic marker, write "DO NOTHING UNLESS YOU CHECK WITH THE COOK FIRST!!!!" This will save you having to eject or yell at someone who was just trying to help you. You can also add, "IF YOU ARE DONE WITH YOUR TASK, CHECK IN WITH THE COOK!!!!".

**Make sure you eat and drink regularly.** This one is hard. I know. But you MUST take care of yourself while being a feast



cook. I find it easiest to NOT eat or drink anything I'm cooking that weekend. On feast day, my best friend is Publix. Buy a couple of foot-long subs on your way to site and keep them in the personal fridge. Make sure you eat at least half of one on Friday night, another half at Saturday at lunch, and another half or even a whole after feast has gone out. You won't want to eat, but you really, really need the calories. Drink lots and lots of water. Again, drink lots and lots of water. Be smart, though. Don't leave an open mug of water on a work surface. Keep your water in a bottle of some sort, with a lid, so it doesn't get spilled or knocked over. Mark it as yours so your helpers won't throw it away. I bring a couple gallons of water in gallon jugs from my house so my digestive system doesn't get messed up with water it might not like. Be smart.

**Have a meeting with your hall steward and plater somewhere around 2PM on feast day.** You are the head cook. You are the one who is responsible for making the feast happen. Make sure your subordinates are all on the same page with you. Make sure your plater knows exactly what will be required, serving gear-wise, for each course. Make sure your hall steward knows how to pronounce the names of the food! Sounds cuckoo, but if you're serving something Russian or Latin, or Mayan, make sure they know how the words are supposed to sound so THEY don't come off looking dumb.

**Is your between-course dish washer on-site and handy?** You need to know where they are and make sure they're in your kitchen when the first course goes to the hall.

**Is your kitchen cleanup crew on-site and available?** You need to know where they are and make sure they're in your kitchen when the second course goes to the hall. Have a conversation with the leader about what to do with leftovers BEFORE they throw out ten pounds of roasted chicken!

**It is hard to remember you're supposed to have fun.** If you are feeling overwhelmed, go outside for a ten-minute fresh air break. Take a walk around the building. Call your best friend on

phone. GET OUT OF THE KITCHEN!!!!!! You will feel better and last longer if you take a little mental health break every so often.

**A great feast doesn't happen with a team of ONE!** You will have lots of people asking to help. Put them to a task & make sure they do it right. If they can't grasp what you're trying to have them do, take the knife away from them and point them toward the door. If you can invent a task for them outside the kitchen, even better. If you don't have time to do it right, you sure as hell don't have time to do it over. Be polite, but firm. If you get a whiner, thank them for their service and shoo them away. Take your ego firmly in hand, because if you even hint that you'd be better off alone, you will find yourself exactly alone, and that is a recipe for disaster.

**Remember you have a kitchen plan.** The whole reason for a kitchen plan is so you don't have to ask your tired brain to "wing it". Know your plan, keep to it as much as possible, and you will put out the best feast of your life.