

Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

Prep a picnic or pool party



Photos Cynthia Brian

A tray with colorful plastic glasses, cool sunglasses, and the cocktail recipe are ready for the pool party.

By Cynthia Brian

“There are few things so pleasant as a picnic eaten in perfect comfort.” – W. Somerset Maugham

Perhaps because I practiced interior design as a professional member of the American Society of Interior Designers for 25 years, or perhaps because my gardener mother always created gorgeous, casual and delicious summer gatherings, my style of summer outdoor entertaining has always included color, surprises and fun. With the lovely warm weather, whether it's throwing a blanket on the deck for an impromptu picnic or setting a stunning table for a themed get-together, dining alfresco is my preferred approach to feeding my guests.

My cues arrive in collaboration between my interior and exterior spaces. Since I designed my garden to be an extension of my home, the out-

door eating areas complement the kitchen creating an inviting flow from my interior décor to the garden rooms. Creating this sense of serenity and continuity is as significant to the outside of the home as it is to the inside. Before I plan my menu or my decorations, I meander around my garden spaces, investigating what flowers will be blooming during the fete and what fruits and vegetables will be ready for harvesting. I want to know what scents, textures, lighting, and colors will be on display on that particular day or evening. Once I've taken a few photos and made notes, the party planning begins.

The goal is to always serve a menu filled with fresh, homegrown ingredients that honor the colors of the rainbow. Whatever is ripe in my garden at the moment will star in the meal. If I didn't grow it, I'll purchase what's in season from a local fruit stand or farmers' market. Tomatoes, beets, arugula, carrots, peppers, eggplant, corn, cucumbers, watermelon, peaches, nectarines, tangerines, apricots, cherries, apples and eggs are a few of my normal staples that will inspire not only the carte du jour, but my tablecloths, floral arrangements, and tableware.

If it's a pool party, sturdy yet pretty shimmering plastic ware is essential as bringing glass near a swimming area is a major no-no. Making sure the lounge chairs have fluffy beach towels, the fountains are spouting or gurgling, and the planters are filled with colorful combinations of annuals are part of designing an inviting setting that encourages the guests to grab a drink, relax, and inhale the fresh air.

For a picnic on the lawn, experiment with an edible arrangement of herbs that can flavor the picnic fare served on paper plates. Basil, thyme, rosemary, mint, sage, lovage, calendula and nasturtium are starters. Setting up a game of croquet offers a sense of play and recreation. For a more formal party, covering chairs with a gauzy material and fashioning a more extravagant centerpiece with roses or peonies adds elegance to the occasion. Besides serving wine, beer or other beverages, consider crafting an original cocktail to get the festivities rolling.

Here's a refreshing summer garden cocktail that I concocted for a girlfriend's birthday that is both luscious and appealing. Measure according to your liking.



Make your pool resort-like with fountains, urns filled with flowers, and comfy chaises.

Summer Garden Cocktail (or Mocktail)

- Muddle together watermelon (including the melon juice) and mint leaves.
- Add the juice of Meyer lemons and limes.
- Stir in a spoonful of honey.
- Pour into a pitcher with equal parts sparkling water and ginger ale.
- Add tequila or your favorite alcohol. (Eliminate the alcohol for a mocktail)
- Stir and pour over crushed ice into glasses rimmed with salt.
- Garnish with a spring of mint and piece of melon on a tiny toothpick umbrella.

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Paella cooking on the outdoor grill is a crowd pleaser.