

[Brandywine Table]

Cooking for a Crowd

A CATERER'S GUIDE

Laura Muzzi Brennan



Steve Poses

WHEN IT COMES TO FEEDING A CROWD, STEVE Poses wrote the book. Literally. *At Home: A Caterer's Guide to Cooking and Entertaining* celebrates its 10th anniversary this year. Its insights and humor—not to mention the clever illustrations by Poses' friend Pascal Lemaître—are indispensable to anyone committed to throwing a party without losing their mind.

Poses' catering chops are familiar to anyone who's followed the Philadelphia and national restaurant scenes in the past five decades. His Frog and Commissary restaurants played a major role in Philly's restaurant renaissance during the 1970s.

Poses was named Restaurateur of the Decade by the Pennsylvania Restaurant Association as well as a member of the first 50 *Who's Who of Cooking in America*. His Frog Commissary Catering has thrown parties all over the tri-state area and been an industry leader as the in-house caterer at The Franklin Institute since the mid-1980s.

When Poses and I chatted, I asked about *At Home's* semi-tongue-in-cheek mission: "to increase national home entertaining by 10%." While he laughed about his lack of metrics, he sincerely believes that when entertaining feels more natural and relaxed, people do it more.

The secret to party Zen: "Planning is more important than any recipe," Poses says. Then he walks me through questions he asks every client. How many people? What are the occasion and season? Where do your guests fall on the "food adventurer" scale? What's your budget? How much space and help do you have? Which adjectives describe your party?



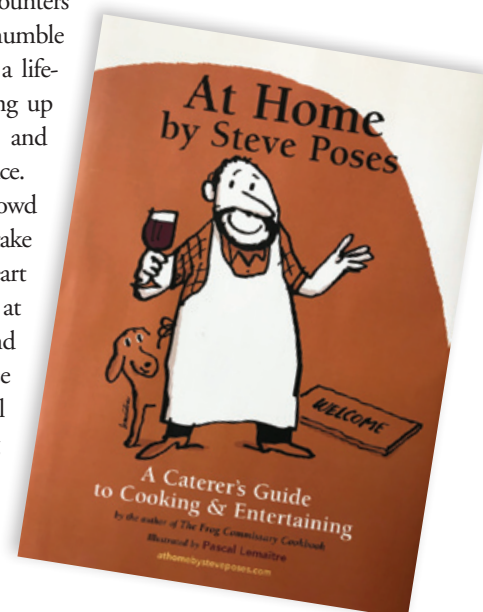
Once you've got answers, it's time to settle on the menu and devise a shopping/cooking schedule. Poses loves "do ahead" dishes—a last minute reheat or garnish is okay—and says "room-temperature food is an entertainer's best friend." His perfect food for a crowd: braised short ribs. As for sauteed foods, they're best saved for Tuesday night dinner for two.

When managing tasks and time, reposition-able labels are an entertainer's second best friend. Poses writes a label for each shopping, cooking and tabletop task. Next he arranges labels on a scheduling template—for him, a large poster board, but home cooks can substitute Post-Its on a kitchen cabinet.

The template includes time slots for two weeks pre-party up through every hour of Party Day. When labels jockey for space in the "day of" section," Poses recommends tweaking both menu and schedule to give yourself more "do-aheads."

Once you've conquered time, it's time to conquer space. Start the party with an empty dishwasher, empty trashcan and organized refrigerator. Create additional space by storing anything you can outdoors—a cold garage or porch easily doubles as a walk-in refrigerator. And keep your counters clear. Poses finds the humble dough scraper to be a life-saving tool for picking up prepped ingredients and cleaning off work space.

Cooking for a crowd can be daunting, but take Poses' wisdom to heart and you'll have fun at your own parties—and maybe even increase the 2019 National Home Entertaining Index to 11%!



Slow-Roasted Pork Shoulder Infused with Lime, Garlic and Thyme

Cooking this inexpensive cut low and slow with just a little liquid is similar to braising, but it produces a more concentrated flavor. It also fills your home for hours with fragrance and anticipation, and the roast ends up with a crispy layer of skin on the outside and fall-apart tender meat on the inside. Most of the time here is inactive, but the roast benefits from occasional basting. Serve with Spanish rice or in tortillas with chopped fresh cilantro, grilled pineapple and salsa verde.



PORK ROASTING VERY SLOWLY...

Do ahead: Pork can be roasted up to three days in advance and stored, covered, in the refrigerator. Reheat, covered in foil, in a 200° oven or serve at room temperature.

- 5-7 lbs. boneless pork butt or shoulder
- 4 garlic cloves, finely chopped plus 1 head garlic, broken into cloves and peeled
- 2-3 Tb. kosher salt
- 1 Tb. coarsely ground pepper
- 2 medium onions, peeled and quartered
- 6-8 generous fresh thyme sprigs
- 4 limes, halved and seeded

Preheat oven to 200°.

Place pork in a shallow roasting pan. In a small bowl, combine chopped garlic, salt and pepper to form a paste. Rub mixture all over the roast, working it into some of the natural crevasses in the meat. Place onions and whole garlic cloves in roasting pan and lay pork over them. Tuck some thyme sprigs into the crevasses in the meat as well and place some under and around the roast. Squeeze limes over the roast and add lime halves to the pan, cut side down.

Cover loosely with aluminum foil and poke some holes into the foil. Roast until meat collapses in on itself, about 10-12 hours. After several hours, occasionally check roast to make sure there is some moisture left in the pan. If not, add a little water. Baste occasionally with the juices.

Makes 8-12 servings.

Grilled Herb-Marinaded Turkey Flank Steak

Grilled turkey breast is a simple and ideal addition to your backyard

It Takes (at least 2) for a Party!

Steve Poses has spent his career thinking and writing about how to host a crowd. Since it takes at least 2 to party, he's also come up with guidelines for how to be a good guest. Check out Poses' tips and quips for entertaining and being entertained!

FOR HOSTS

Dream ... and then plan like crazy. Excellent entertaining is more a matter of aspiration and organization than it is of skill.

Time it right. If you leave everything to the last minute, you'll have only a minute to do everything. Aim to have an hour of calm before the party.

Do the dishes. Once the sink is full of dirty dishes, you're sunk, so start your party with an empty dish washer, empty dish rack and empty sink.

Start with a sip. Offering a "house" cocktail kicks the party off with a level of intentionality and excitement. You can plan and often mix it in advance. One recent favorite: hibiscus-infused bourbon mixed with Lillet and topped with sparkling rosé.

Don't worry about perfect. The impressive part is that you are throwing a party at all!

FOR GUESTS

Don't arrive early. The early guest is the unwelcome guest. In arriving early, you disturb the host's hour of pre-party peace and essentially demand that the host put down their oven mitts and pay attention to you.

Stay out of the kitchen. Unless you're explicitly invited into the cook's lair to help, find another place to hang out.

Don't do things halfway. If you're bringing something for the host, bring all the components. For example, if you're bringing flowers, bring them arranged in a vase. Bring food on the platter on which it will be served, if room temperature, or in the casserole in which it will be heated.

barbecue repertoire. A whole boneless turkey breast is too thick to grill because the outside would become dry and charred before the interior is cooked through. But by simply slicing a breast into "flank steaks" and giving it a good marinade, the turkey breast becomes both grill-worthy and grill-friendly.

There are several variables in grilling your turkey "flank steak." These include how hot the grill is and the variable thickness of the breast. It's very helpful to use an instant-read thermometer. You can cook the turkey in either of two ways: 1. over medium high heat the whole time (as explained below) or 2. start on medium high just until the outside chars. Then lower the heat and cook on the grill or in a 350° oven. In either case, cook until the internal temperature reaches 155°.

Do ahead: You can marinate up to two days in advance. As with most things grilled, it's best to eat shortly after removing from the grill or within 2 hours. Do not refrigerate before serving.

- 4 lb. boneless turkey breast

- 4 Tb. chopped garlic

- ³/₄ cup tarragon leaves, chopped (about 3 Tb. for marinade and 2 Tb. to add after slicing)

5 Tb. olive oil
1 lemon plus 6–8 lemon wedges, trimmed
1–2 tsp. kosher salt
1⁄8 tsp. fresh ground black pepper



With a sharp knife, cut turkey breast in half, cutting parallel to cutting surface. Rinse and pat dry.

In a dish large enough to hold breast, combine garlic, 3 Tb. tarragon and olive oil. Add pieces of breast, one at a time and coat well with marinade. Cover and refrigerate at least 2 hours, but ideally 6–8 hours.

Preheat grill or grill pan to medium high.

Remove breasts from marinade, lightly scraping away some of the garlic and tarragon. The breast will take some time to cook and the chopped garlic will burn. Having a bit is fine, but you don’t want your breast covered with charred garlic.

Place breast on grill or in grill pan and cook first side for about 8–10 minutes. Turn and cook until thermometer reads about 155° in the thickest part of breast, about another 8–10 minutes.

Allow to rest for at least 10 minutes before slicing. Cut into about 1⁄4-inch thick slices against the natural grain of breast.

Squeeze lemon over sliced turkey. Add salt and pepper. Sprinkle with 2 Tb. tarragon. Serve with lemon wedges.

Makes 6–8 servings.

Dressed-up Quinoa

Quinoa makes a wonderful blank canvas for all sorts of mix-ins, so feel free to experiment with this easy side dish. It can be made 2 days in advance and kept in the refrigerator. Bring to room temperature before serving and you are good to go!

2 C. white quinoa
3½ C. chicken broth
1 tsp. salt, optional
12-oz. jar marinated artichoke hearts, drained, roughly chopped
12-oz. jar roasted red or yellow peppers, drained and roughly chopped if peppers come whole
4 large garlic cloves

6 Tb. lemon juice
8 Tb. olive oil
Generous ½ C. chopped fresh mint
1⁄3 C. snipped fresh chives
Salt and pepper to taste
Pinches of allspice and cayenne, to taste
½ C. raisins, more to taste
1 C. crumbled feta, more or less to taste
½ C. pistachio pieces



Using a fine mesh strainer, rinse quinoa under running water. This gets rid of the grain’s outer coating which can impart a bitter or soapy taste.

In a large saucepan, combine quinoa and broth. If broth is too bland for your taste, add 1 tsp. salt or to taste. Bring to a boil. Then reduce to a simmer, cover and cook for 10–12 minutes until liquid is absorbed. Stir the grains and allow to cool to room temperature.

While quinoa cooks, combine artichokes and peppers in one bowl. If garlic has any green shoots in the middle, remove and discard them. (Otherwise, they will add a bitter taste to the dressing.) Mince garlic. Combine garlic, lemon juice, olive oil, mint, chives and salt and pepper to taste. The mixture looks similar to salsa verde.

Mix quinoa with artichoke mixture. Mix in dressing. Season with allspice and cayenne.

Right before serving, mix in raisins, feta and pistachio pieces.

Makes 10–12 servings.

Lemon Bars

My friend Courtney gave me this recipe over 20 years ago, and I’ve made it many times since. You can make bars 2–3 days in advance. Just cover loosely and store at room temperature. Cutting them with a dough scraper will give cleaner edges than using a knife.

1 C. butter, softened
½ C. confectioners’ sugar plus more for dusting
2 C. plus 1 Tb. flour, divided
4 extra large eggs, room temperature

2 C. sugar
6 Tb. lemon juice (or 7 Tb. for extra tartness)
½ tsp. baking powder
1 C. chopped pecans

Preheat oven to 350°.

Line a 10 x 14 bar pan baking pan (9 x 13 works, too) with parchment paper. The paper should be long enough to come over the sides so that when bars are ready to be cut, you can simply grab onto the parchment paper and lift them out.

In a large bowl or stand mixer, combine butter, ½ C. confectioners’ sugar and 2 C. flour just until dough forms. Press dough into pan and smooth with your hand or a dough roller until dough is an even thickness. Bake 15 minutes until dough just starts to take on color.

While crust cooks, beat eggs slightly in a large bowl. Add sugar, lemon juice, baking powder, remaining 1 Tb. flour and pecans. Pour over pastry. Bake for 40–50 minutes until the top is set. Cool in pan and dust with confectioners’ sugar.

Grab hold of parchment paper and lift straight up so bars stay in one whole piece. Place on cutting board and cut into 12–16 pieces. If you’re using a regular knife, wipe it clean between cuts.

Makes 12–16 servings. ♦

Laura traces her love of all things culinary to the first time she leafed through her mother’s Betty Crocker’s Cooky Book—which still occupies a place of honor among her 700+ cookbooks. A passionate supporter of local food, she co-founded a farmers market, judges area food contests, and anticipates restaurant openings with the excitement most people reserve for winning a Mega Millions jackpot.



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