

TWELVE TIPS FOR SERVING BUFFET STYLE

Sometimes a buffet is a casual, family event. Other times it's a special occasion, and you want everything to be just so-- to reflect the importance of the occasion.

1. The first consideration in setting up your buffet is the **TRAFFIC FLOW**. Think about where your guests can most easily *start through the line* and then *go to where they will be eating*, without bumping into each other.
2. Wherever you place your **PLATES** is, of course, *the beginning of the line*.
 - * If you're using **disposable plates**, be certain that they are **strong enough** to hold the food.
 - * **Or use paper plate holders** (plastic or wicker, rattan, or bamboo). The paper plate holders are a good investment, since they can be used over and over.
 - * **Plastic** plate holders are the **easiest to keep clean**.
 - * **You may prefer the look of wicker, rattan, or bamboo**. Also, the wicker, rattan, and bamboo **could be spray-painted** gold or silver for a little holiday glitz. Or you may choose some other color that goes with your décor.
 - * If you get **paper plate holders that are fairly flat on the edges**, rather than having a wide lip, you can get by with having **plates that are a little larger than the holder**.
 - * **To save space on the table and make the line go faster**, match the paper plates to their holders before you stack them, rather than having two separate stacks.
3. Place the **SILVERWARE AND NAPKINS** *after the food*, since it is sometimes awkward for guests to hold onto them while dishing up their plates.
 - * To save room on the table, **put the eating utensils in a silverware caddy, or make your own substitute**.
 - * **For real silverware**, heavy glasses or small, heavy vases that blend with your décor will work to hold your silverware.
 - * **For disposable eating utensils**, heavy or lightweight glasses or vases, pencil cups, or even spray-painted cans that match your décor can hold your eating utensils.
 - * Choose **disposable eating utensils that are strong enough** for the foods to be eaten, without breaking.
 - * If you invest in sturdy disposable eating utensils, you can always **wash and reuse them**.
 - * **Another option** to make the line move faster is to **wrap a napkin around each set of eating utensils** and tie some jute, ribbon, or yarn around it. Then you can just stack them up or place them in a basket. Bear in mind that you will need some extras when someone accidentally drops a fork or spoon.
4. Place **YOUR MOST PLENTIFUL FOODS** at the *beginning of the line*. The guests are likely to serve up more generous portions of the first things they encounter. Be sure to put **CONDIMENTS** *right after the foods for which they will be used*.
5. If you are serving dishes with unusual or unknown ingredients, it's helpful to guests if you use **PLACE CARDS TO DESCRIBE THE DISHES**. If they are certain they **will not care for it**, they would rather not put something on their plates they will not eat. It may be helpful to people with certain **food allergies**, too. It can be as simple as taking a 3x5 plain index card, folding it in half, writing on it, and setting it up.

6. If you are serving **SWEETS**, place them as the ***last food or on a separate space***. You may want some ***small plates*** in case the guests want to come back later for that. Extra ***forks*** will be needed if it isn't finger food.
7. **CUPS AND DRINKS** should be at the very end. Guests need ***a place to set their plates down*** while they pour their drinks. You may want to put the drinks station in a separate place. ***Disposable cups that can be stacked up*** save space. Low, ***wide-bottom cups*** prevent spills.
8. **IF GUESTS WILL NOT ALL HAVE A SOLID PLACE** to put their plates down while they eat, Serve ***foods that don't have to be cut*** (except for soft things, such as cake).
9. Flowers, candles or other **EMBELLISHMENT MAKES THE TABLE LOOK SPECIAL**. It doesn't have to be flowers or candles. Think of something that has to do with the occasion. ***Consult the internet*** for ideas or ***come up with your own original ideas*** to decorate your table.
10. Don't forget to have **A PLACE WHERE GUESTS CAN DISPOSE OF PLATES, ETC.**, when they are done.
 - * ***For trash***, have a ***trash can*** or a large ***box*** or paper grocery ***bag*** handy for anything that should be discarded.
 - * ***For silverware or for plastic eating utensils*** you want to wash and reuse, have a large ***bowl*** with a little ***sudsy water***.
 - * ***For real or reusable plates***, have a ***dishpan*** with a little ***sudsy water***.
 - * ***For real or reusable cups***, have a ***bucket*** with a little ***sudsy water***.
 - * You can use ***place cards*** (such as a 3x5 plain index card folded in half, labeled, and set up) to let guests know ***what each sudsy water container is designated for***.
 - * ***Saving and reusing*** your disposable items not only ***saves a little money***, but it is ***very good for the environment***.
11. If this is a **POT-LUCK BUFFET**, you may want to use ***place cards*** to show where you would like each ***category of food placed***.
12. Save yourself some last-minute scurrying around by putting out **TRIVETS OR HOTPADS** for hot dishes and **A SERVING UTENSIL FOR EACH DISH *ahead of time***. The more prepared you are, the more relaxed you will be—and better able to enjoy the event.

