

SIMPLY SCOTTISH A Wee Taste of Scotland



SIMPLY SCOTTISH A WEE TASTE OF SCOTLAND THE EXTRA BITS!

When I wrote Simply Scottish A Wee Taste Of Scotland in February 2013 it was written as a book about Scottish party food showing how our traditional recipes could be easily translated into scrumptious party sized nibbles.

A lot of thought and effort went into researching the whole idea of party principals; those all important issues of how much food you'll need to serve what number of guests and how much you might need in regard to the type and duration of your party.

There was also the information on the bits and pieces you'll need for a party, and safety info on keeping your food at the correct temperature.

As this was a party food book I took all the photos with a party slant, presenting everything in a way I thought would give you, the reader some ideas for plating your own party goodies.

Well the publisher didn't think that a book on Scottish themed party food would sell, but that Scottish snack food might go the distance. They insisted that I remove all the party information and references and instead mention frequently that each dish would be ideal for picnics, lunches and snacks.

I complied with this in order that the book would go out, but personally I feel that this is a party food book and that you are entitled to the information I had written about party planning and the hints and tips I had put together.

So in this little document you have the extra pages, what I feel are the all important words that should be part of A Wee Taste Of Scotland.

Karon



PARTY PLANNING

Impromptu spur of the moment parties can be great fun but taking the time and effort to plan and prepare for a party can make the difference between a great gathering that people will remember for ages afterwards and a complete disaster that will be recalled for all the wrong reasons.

Planning is all part of the fun. Coming up with ideas and concepts, the where and when, the what to eat and drink, the who and why. So many questions, so many different answers and scenarios.

But party planning has a serious side too. Getting your numbers right is really important, you wouldn't want to invite ten friends over and only have enough food and drink for six. You'll want to organize your room space, seating and lighting. Choose your music in advance, maybe organizing a playlist on your music system so there is not a mad scrabbling for CDs during the party and deciding if your party should have a theme or not.

	Why	theme or not
	Who	guests and numbers
Where		location, lighting, seating, music etc
When		time, tea party, aperitif, cocktail party

Once you have these sorted out in your head you can move on to the exciting part – the food and drinks you'll be serving.

WHY

Why are you having this party? Of course you don't need an excuse to hold a party but is this party for any particular reason? A birthday, anniversary, special date or event (Christmas, New Year, Burns Night, and Halloween etc), this all affects the theme of the event.

You want to really tie in everything to your theme and make sure your guests know what the party is for. If it is just for no apparent reason then say so. There is nothing worse for a guest than turning up to a party and finding it was being held to celebrate a birthday they didn't even know about, they will be embarrassed from the word go. This is equally important with themed parties, if you tell people that your party has a Scottish theme then they will at least have an idea of what to expect.

If you want people to dress or bring something that relates to the theme you have chosen then it is up to you to tell them. People cannot read your mind or in between the proverbial lines, so if you just say 'Come to my Scottish party' they won't know if they are expected to dress accordingly or not. Everyone hates the idea of being the odd-one-out, we all like reassurance and guidelines as to what is expected of us. It's up to you as the host to make everything as easy as possible for your guests and this starts right at the beginning with how you invite them to your party.

WHO

This is an all-important subject, as who you are entertaining makes a difference as to how you'll go about doing it.

If it is a family gathering with a mixture of ages you will have to cater for this in the type of food and drinks you are serving, having dishes suitable for children and more soft drinks available.

Parties for family and friends can be as relaxed and casual as you want them to be, after all you are all part of a group, and you know each other well and don't have to stand on ceremony. Even if the party is for a big event there is still the element of informality...

If the party is for a business event it would tend to be more formal in nature as people don't really know each other on an informal footing. There is always an element of people being on best behavior and maybe even a little competition going on.

A mix of friends and acquaintances means that the host has to balance the casualness of one side with a bit of formality on the other. Although you want to be yourself and have everyone relax, you will want to make sure that both sides mix and chat. This is when interesting food can play a really big part as it gives people something to chat about that breaks the ice.

WHERE

Location, location, location!

Those all important words when it comes to house hunting. They apply here too. Where are you holding your party? If it is at home is it indoors or outdoors. If it is outdoors in Scotland then you will have a Plan B on hand should the weather act up and throw rain, sleet or snow at you.

Do you have enough space? Make sure there is a flow of traffic, kitchen, living room hallway etc. Remove all superfluous clutter and trip hazards (I know, sounds like a health and safety risk assessment but if you are having a group of people in your house you really have to think of things like fire hazards and safety for all concerned).

Take a Seat

Seating arrangements. If you are having a sit down brunch, lunch or supper you obviously have to have a table and enough chairs for all of your guests. This is where planning is really important, having someone arrive who wasn't expected at a sit down event can be a disaster but something easily dealt with if it were a more casual stand up event.

Seating is still important for a stand up affair even though that sounds like a contradiction in terms! Don't just haul out all your chairs and leave your guests standing in an empty room. You have to supply chairs for people just not as many and certainly not all gathered round one table like a dinner party.

Don't have chairs round the outside of the room leaving the centre empty like a school disco. This makes people really uncomfortable, especially those who arrive first and don't know quite what to do. Make small islands of seating so people can talk in natural groups. A couple of seats with a small side table are perfect. Even if you don't have lots of side tables think of other things you can use instead, a big pile of solid hard-back books makes an ideal side table, as do those old fashioned wooden bottle crates. If you are not into the eclectic look then just cover your impromptu tables with a colourful cloth and no one will be any the wiser. But honestly people really like to see inventiveness and I've found that my use of old books as side tables always makes a talking point and that's what you want at parties.

Light And Shade

Lighting is hugely important at parties. Going back to the dreaded school discos with the problematic seating you also had that all-too-bright overhead lighting to contend with, hardly atmospheric was it. Try to lose the overhead lighting (unless you have dimmers) when you are hosting a party, soft lighting and side lighting is not just more flattering to your guests but it is also much more relaxing, and let's face it, relaxing is the name of the game at parties.

Candle light is wonderful but of course care must be taken and safety is paramount when it comes to using candles. Safety aside, don't go for lots of different scented candles or your house will smell like the perfume area in a department store, if you are going for fragrance stick to one type only.

Sounds Super

If music be the food of love.....

Music is to parties what salt is to vinegar, they just go together. Don't leave music to the last minute, take a bit of time to think this through. Are you using a CD player? If so sort out all the CDs that you will be wanting and have them ready to hand. There is nothing worse than scrabbling about amid hundreds of CDs (most in the wrong cases of course) desperately trying to find something to play while silence reigns supreme and everyone can hear you muttering and swearing at your own ineptitude. If you are using an MP3 player or iPod of some sort then put together a playlist beforehand so that you have all the music you want right there and don't have to trawl through thousands of tracks.

Suit the music to the occasion and the people. Think of the ages of your guests and what they like. Remember that you don't want the music to overwhelm or take over; it is meant to be in the background adding to the whole event, not being the star of the show. If in doubt always go for something middle-of-the-road and easy listening. Just because you like Iron Maiden or Pink doesn't mean to say that your Auntie Flo would be comfortable listening to those lyrics. Think of your guests rather than yourself.

For Scottish themed parties why not put together a play list that includes a few tracks from The Proclaimers, some piping etc. You don't have to go overboard and inflict the entire works of pipes and drums on your guests. Just a wee taste of Scotland here and there will be fun.

WHEN

This is an all important question as it makes a huge difference to the type of party/food/booze that you are going to need. Parties can be at any time of day from a casual Sunday Brunch at 11am to an afternoon Tea Party, or from Cocktails before going on to dinner or a show, to an all out Cocktail Party that lasts all evening.

It is not just the time of day you have to take into consideration but the length of the party itself as this will affect the amount of food and drink you will need to provide.

Having people over for early evening drinks before either serving a meal yourself or going out to dinner elsewhere will be a short affair of an hour or so, therefore you can work out how much you'll need in the way of supplies. Hosting a come-round-for-drinks party, more of an Open House would usually last around 2 hours. A full blown Cocktail Party where guests will be with you for up to 4 or 5 hours requires a lot more in the way of nibbles to sustain your guests throughout the evening and not leave them completely sozzled by alcohol or chewing the carpets with starvation.

The Numbers Game - Time

Here are some guidelines to take into consideration when it comes to working out your food/drinks to time ratio;

For a 1 hour event allow 4-5 pieces per person and have a selection of 3 or 4 different dishes.

For a 2 hour event allow 10-12 pieces per person and have a selection of 4 – 6 different dishes.

For an all out cocktail party lasting all evening with no main meal in sight allow 14-16 pieces per person and have a selection of at least 10 dishes.

When it comes to drinks remember that the more casual the gathering the more people are likely to drink.

This is just a rough guide of what you might need for a middle of the road 2 hour event;

Have a choice of drinks;

Always have at least 2 non alcoholic choices for your guests, nowadays there are always designated drivers and it shows that you care if you make a bit of effort here. Have at least ½ litre per person.

As well as these have a choice of at least 2 of the following depending on what you think your friends would like and your budget.

Sparkling wine or champagne allow about half a bottle per person.

Red or white wine, allow ½ a bottle per person.

Cocktails allow 3 per person.

Beer or cider allow 4 per person.

I like to offer a signature cocktail on arrival (having a non alcoholic version is a great idea as it means nobody is left out) and then have a selection of just wine and beer as well as the non alcoholic drinks.

FOOD

All important and after what this entire book is all about. If you have got your Ws sorted out (the Why, Who, Where and When) then it is time to think about that most important of all issues – the Food. What are you going to serve to your guests?

The fact that you are holding this book in your hands suggests that you are at least showing a keen interest in what you'll serve to your guests and want to make a bit of an effort yourself, you are also keen to try something Scottish or you'd have picked up any number of books dedicated to party food in general.

First and foremost think of your party food not just as something to soak up the alcohol and keep hunger pangs at bay, but as an element in its own right. Something that looks, smells and tastes great, it brings people together in sharing and talking, almost the binding ingredient that pulls everything together.

So while you have to plan your party a bit like a recipe where you have the Who, What, Where and When as your ingredients, think of the food as the eggs that will bring all those things together into the perfect party cake mix.

We have already talked a little about roughly how much food you will need to cater to your party, now you have to decide what type of food you want to serve. I have put together over 50 choices for you here and I've covered everything from hot and cold Soup Sips right through the spectrum of a 'normal' meal ending

up with dessert recipes. You can mix and match whatever you want depending on the circumstances/time/duration of party and you can also add in any number of premade or bought dishes to extend your repertoire.

You can go all out Scottish or add bits and pieces of other cultures to your party menu.

The Numbers Game – People

We have already worked out roughly what you will need in the way of dishes and choices in relationship to the length of the party, now let's talk about the number of people you are catering to and how much food you should need.

Let's take that 2 hour party we used as the example for the amount of drinks required in the last chapter.

If you were to have 8 guests at this party and they were eating 10 pieces of food each that would be a total of 80 pieces.

16 guests = 160

24 guests = 240

You chose a selection of 5 different dishes, that would mean for a party of 8 guests you'd need to prepare 16 pieces of each dish. However, for soups I usually serve one cup/glass per guest.

I always cater on the higher side as it's always better to have too much food than to run out and have guests go hungry.

It is entirely up to you how you choose to divide up your selection of dishes, but for me I tend to use the whole range of dishes (soup sips, fish, meat, veggie and desserts) only when I am hosting a full length cocktail party that goes on all evening. I think of it as an on-going on-your-feet dinner party so like to cover the normal menu of a sit down dinner but in miniature.

Safety first

Now that you have decided on all the elements of your party especially that all-important food, you have to take into consideration food safety. We all want our parties to be memorable but for the right reasons, not because half the guests ended up in A&E due to food poisoning!

There are really just a few rules that you must keep in mind here;

Any food requiring refrigeration should not sit out at room temperature for more than 1 hour.

Hot food should be kept at 140 degrees and cold at 40 degrees.

To keep food hot use insulated containers, warming trays or chafing dishes, think of those 1970s hostess trollies!

Use the oven at 200 degrees to keep back-up food warm.

To keep food cold place ice under the serving dishes and replace this as it melts.

PARTY PIECES

Before we can even get to the obvious things, the top of the iceberg elements that everyone sees when they come to your party – the crockery, glassware and cutlery; because you do need something with which to serve your goodies, let's deal with a major How issue.

How are you going to serve your food? Is it to be set out buffet style on a large table for guests to come and help themselves? Are you going to have selected dishes scattered on side tables etc and also go around mingling with your guests and offering nibbles on platters and trays? The latter is a great way to integrate your guests, create conversations and generally break the ice. It might mean a bit more work for you but it also means that you can keep an eye on what you are running low on and have stand by food ready when the time comes.

BUFFET

If you are setting up a buffet table then put a bit of planning into the layout. You want people to be able to both see and reach all the dishes easily, have suitable serving utensils to hand and have side plates, napkins and any required cutlery within reach.

Give the table some height in places by building up a few stacks of books, solid boxes or even DVD and CD

cases on the table itself underneath the tablecloth (of course you are using a cloth it looks so much more festive than a bare table) this provides a more interesting viewpoint and if you raise some of the dishes at the back of the table it means that your guests will be able to reach them more easily.

MINGLE

If you are going to be handing around nibbles try to enlist some help in this, don't be a party martyr as you will end up being the only person there who doesn't enjoy themselves at all. If you haven't got any handy family, teenagers or friends organized beforehand just ask a couple of guests that you know well to give you a hand. Most people are only too pleased to be asked to hand round food as it gives them a chance to meet new people without the awkwardness of having to introduce themselves.

Even if you are handing round food on trays it is also a good idea to have some nibbles on side tables so that guests can help themselves now and then. Remember to circulate and top up dishes and change them throughout the party.

STICKS & STONES

Which ever way you choose to serve and display your food if you are dealing with olives or any food on cocktail sticks and picks do make sure that you have somewhere for guests to dispose of the debris. There is nothing worse than having to clutch a handful of olive stones because there is nowhere to dump them.

HARDWARE

Don't think you have to have fancy crockery and glassware to host a good party. Mix and match is the name of the game, but there are just a few rules that make things look a little more pulled together.

Go for white crockery as your base. White comes in every price range so you can mix your IKEA mini cups with big bold platters you have had to save up for. Plain white comes in a wide variety of styles too and is totally neutral, you can jazz it up with splashes of colour or other pattern. This way you can tie in old special pieces, holiday finds etc into your party stash because the background is so neutral, you are not stuck with one style/colour and having to match everything together and only buy from one company.

Another reason for using white as your base colour for party ware is that its simplicity shows off your food to its best advantage and doesn't detract from it. Imagine if you put beautiful pate filled filo flowers on a plate that is all bright colours and heavily patterned, you'll hardly notice the food for the pattern, but if you put them on a plain white platter they stand out and look their best. Think of your plates as the frames for your arty food creations.

If you want to add colour to your party ware it is a good idea to pick one colour, ie blue and have some blue print plates, blue floral cups, blue striped platters to mix with the plain white. This stops things getting too bitty and cluttered looking.

For a great Scottish look keep your eyes open for anything with thistles, heather or tartan. Look out for soft heathery colours like mauves, soft pinks and creams, also rustic warm colours like bracken and soft greens. Another good idea is to add natural elements to your table, think wicker bread basket, rough textured linen, tweed, wool, river pebbles, driftwood and of course real heather and thistles. Look for ceramics in soft tartan colours, Almi is a beautiful brand but there are lots of local potters with outstanding work that really has a good Scottish feel to it.

Just remember that less is very often more and a few key pieces for your theme with a basic background works far better than going all out and ending up with that cluttered tourist shop look. Remember you are going for a theme for your party not a take over bid.

A lot of my recipes call for tiny individual serving glasses and plates, some are simple ramekins that you can buy in any cookware department, others are vintage pieces like old liqueur and cordial glasses from charity shops and antique fairs. I love thinking 'outside the box' when it comes to party presentation. Recycle jam jars, small vases, tiny tins and even children's tea party dishes as containers for your party nibbles and bites.

The French are experts on cocktail dishes or amouse bouche as they are called, you will find shops over there devoted to specially made serving dishes, mini bowls and tiny cutlery. You don't have to spend a fortune and go overboard though, again think outside the usual confines, big serving spoons can become mini bowls, those Chinese soup spoons are perfect holders for lots of appetizers. Eggcups, espresso cups, shot glasses and votive holders can all find new uses in the world of the party.

If you are hiring glasses for the event make sure that you unpack them and check for cleanliness and damage in good time. You don't want to be doing this just as your guests arrive and find that some glasses are already broken, or be madly washing and drying them when you should be stepping out in style with a welcoming smile and a full glass in your hand not a wet one!

NAPKINS

Whether you go for fabric or paper these are a must. Party food means sticky fingers and these are death to party clothes. Also, if you are not using any individual plates at all the napkins will have to double up as plates as well so they become even more important.

Traditionally cocktail napkins are a tad smaller than the usual dinner variety, you can easily make your own if you are remotely crafty and have some scraps of fabric handy. Just cut out 22 x 22cm squares and turn a 1cm hem all round and stitch. You could even cut out the fabric with pinking sheers and avoid the need to sew completely, this would give a nice rustic look if you were using old linen or natural skim. For ease and simplicity go for paper napkins. In the past few years there has been a resurgence in interest in these so the quality and variety of designs available has increased immeasurably. You can now get paper napkins in a huge range of colours, patterns and themes. Everything from pirates to paisley, plain to textured and of course some great tartans and Scottish prints too.

CLEANLINESS

This goes without saying really, but in the last minute rush of a party it is all too easy to forget to polish up glasses and double check your crockery. Take the time and make the effort to ensure everything is sparkling and looks its best. Don't let something like this let you down after you've put in so much time and effort in to everything else.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Just like any self respecting iceberg your perfectly prepared party food doesn't just boil down to the pretty platters displayed so temptingly for friends, there are lots of bits and pieces going on unseen (underwater in the case of the iceberg) that together make that perfection possible.

You do not need to go mad and buy every kitchen gadget in the book to provide fun food for your family and friends, however I have found a few things to be invaluable. Here is my list of must have goodies in the kitchen;

Baking trays and sheets; You'll need a few of these and go for the largest size possible. They are handy not just for actually baking but for use in the fridge too. Always buy the best you can as cheap oven trays tend to warp and cause things to bake unevenly.

Blender; A kitchen staple, great for soups and sauces and cocktails too!

Blowtorch; A mini kitchen blowtorch is the perfect thing for carmelising your porridge brulee. I know you can do this under the grill but a blowtorch means you are in full control and I find it a lot quicker too.

Bottles; Little mini bottles are great for serving sauces and alcoholic shots.

Boxes; From plastic storage boxes in all sizes for keeping things protected both in and out of the fridge to cute little display boxes that you can put crisps, nuts and nibbles in. think outside the box for all sorts of ideas.

Bricks; Yes bricks in the kitchen, and not just to build the walls. I use a foil covered brick to flatten bacon slices when cooking.

Cocktail Shaker; Guess what, for cocktails. If you don't have one use a large jam jar and sieve out ice as you pour.

Cookie Cutters; These are a must for making mini pies, all sorts of cookies and candies. Buy a set of fluted and plain to cover all eventualities.

Cups; Look out for all sorts of mini cups from espresso to children's sized tea cups, perfect for soup sips and puddings too.

Food Processor; Saves so much time on chopping and grating.

Forks; Normal forks for decorating pastry and dishing up food, to pastry forks and cocktail forks in anything from metal to coloured plastic.

Frying Pan; Griddle/skillet whatever you want to call it, a basic kitchen item.

Glasses; Mini glasses meant for shots, cordials and liqueurs, make it a mission to collect them all, they cost pennies and make a great display. Wine glasses, cocktail glasses and other drinking glasses can all be used for serving as well as carrying their usual liquid cargo.

Grater; Whatever your preference, always useful especially for citrus fruit. I find my microplane grater best for this task.

Kitchen Roll; Use this for draining fried food, straining cocktails if necessary and of course mopping up those spills.

Knives; I like a really neat little paring knife, a big knife and a bread knife. You don't need anything fancier than that.

Lollipop Sticks; Hunt these out in any different colours and types, from plain wood to bright plastic.

Mandolin; Perfect for those paper-thin slices, but watch your fingers if you haven't used one of these guys before, they are seriously sharp!

Mini Muffin Tin; I have 2 and use them a lot in my recipes, again buy the best you can.

Mixing Bowls; Another kitchen staple, if you have some pretty bowls they can double up as serving dishes.

Pastry brush; for glazing rolls, tart tops etc.

Platters and Trays; Collect these in lots of styles, sizes and shapes as they are incredibly useful.

Pots & Pans; High sided cooking pot with heavy base for deep frying, small pot for making sauces etc.

Rolling Pin; No baker would be complete without one.

Scissors; So much easier to just snip chives etc, always keep your kitchen scissors clean and sharp.

Slotted Spoon; For removing deep fried items from oil.

Spoons; All sizes from serving spoons to mini tea spoons and coffee spoons, check out antique shops and car boot sales for some classic designs.

Tart Tins; I have 2 of these for making my mini pies and tarts, again go for good quality so they won't warp in the oven.

Wooden Spoon; I would never be without my wooden spoons in the kitchen.

I complied with this in order that the book would go out, but personally I feel that this is a party food book and that you are entitled to the information I had written about party planning and the hints and tips I had put together.