

Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View

Dear Listener:

Thank you for stopping by for a visit at Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View podcast! To make it easy, you will find a transcript of each episode. I hope you enjoy the visit!

Episode 28- How to Enjoy a Potluck

Welcome to Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View. Thanks for stopping by! Grab a glass of Lemonade, pull up a rocker and join me for conversations about living the Simple Life. Go ahead. Get comfortable and settle in for a good visit. It's time to relax and enjoy!

In our last visit, we talked about finding ways to survive high prices. Today, I want to get deeper into another way to do this – and have fun in the process.

It's called a Potluck. To give you some background, the term 'potluck' actually stems from the English words combined – 'pot' being a vessel for food, and 'latch' being the luck. Together, it was called a 'potlatch'.

In spite of the fact we Southerners like to believe we invented the potluck, there is a good possibility these informal gatherings have been going on since the late 1700s. A man by the name of Thomas Nashe used the term in a work of 16th Century writing.

If you look even further back, the potlatch may very well stem from having an unexpected visitor stop in. If this was the case, the potluck was literally being lucky to be served whatever was being cooked at the time. Beggars really couldn't be choosy in this situation.

During the Depression Era, potlucks were popular as a means of stretching your food. Each person would have the expense of preparing just one dish, instead of a full meal. Neighbors and communities would gather and place all their offerings on a table. From there, everyone would be able to enjoy a meal, without having to spend a tremendous amount of money, or use up what little they had in their pantry.

Today, the three most famous occasions for a potluck are church suppers, funerals, and family gatherings. Here in the south, it is considered a major faux pas if you don't take a meal to a family going through the bereavement process. When families get together, it can be just too expensive for one person to serve a meal, so often everyone pitches in.

And if you have never eaten at a church potluck, you are missing out on one of the biggest blessings in life. I wish I could find a way to schedule all the ladies at my church to bring me a meal every day for the rest of my life – their skills in the kitchen are unsurpassed!

There are other reasons to have a potluck, and that is to just celebrate friends and neighbors. It's not just you and I who are suffering high prices – most everyone in the world is. Why not commiserate with your friends, neighbors, and family by having a potluck? It won't just save everyone a bit of money and provide them with a good meal, but you will also have a lot of fun in the process!

There is another benefit to a potluck as well. You get to sample a wide selection of food. Some of the dishes you may have never tried before. Others may have a different recipe – there are probably as many potato salad recipes as there are folks who make it. Kinda like snowflakes – no two are exactly alike.

And let's just add the cherry on top of that ice cream sundae – unless it is a super-secret family thing, you may just get a few recipes out of the deal.

One thing that may have crossed your mind – food safety. Yes, that does need to be a concern. Did you know that Minnesota actually has a 'Church Lady Law' on the books? Instead of forcing churches to adhere to the strict food safety laws (which would have more than likely shut down those church dinners altogether), each church would assign one person to take food safety classes. From there, they would oversee church dinners to insure all the food was handled properly.

Not all states have a Church Lady law, but safe food handling does need to be of utmost importance. For the most part, that is simple. If you have a hot dish, bake it right before heading to the party. Cover it in foil, and then wrap it in either a towel or one of those casserole carriers designed to keep food hot.

If it is a cold dish, invest in frozen cold packs and an ice chest. Both of these make your food easy to transport and keeps it at the appropriate temperature.

Another tip is to show up on time, and as the hostess, have everything in place and ready to go as soon as the guests arrive. Yes, there is always that one person who runs late, but if that is the case, just add their contribution to the table. Hungry folks will find it.

If your potluck is an outside affair, be sure to keep the lid on things. This prevents bugs from getting in the food while everyone is sitting down to eat. You can remove the lids as folks go through the serving line, but as soon as the last one fills their plates, start covering the food. And leave the desserts covered until it's time to serve them.

You may be also asking yourself what you should bring. With a potluck, just about anything goes. In most cases, a potluck meal consists of sliced meats, a crockpot filled with roast beef and vegetables, casseroles, vegetables, and even fried chicken. There are assorted breads, from hot rolls to homemade loaves. Desserts range from cakes, pies, cookies, and here in the south you will always find a bowl of Banana pudding.

If you aren't sure, talk to the one who is hosting it. Ask them what others are bringing, or what they suggest. I'm gonna tell you a little secret – a lot of the folks around here are famous for one dish or another. If they are, you can bet they will bring whatever that dish is. And then you have a few who are competitive, which means they will bring a similar item just to see if they can 'dethrone' the king or queen of that dish. For the most part, it is done in good sport – but not a single person would ever knowingly or willingly volunteer as a judge. We just aren't that stupid.

There is an old folk tale about a couple of hungry strangers who would arrive in a town carrying nothing else but a cooking pot. Somehow, they convinced the townspeople to each contribute some of their food to the pot. By the time everyone was finished, the strangers and the townspeople all enjoyed a big pot of soup. Depending on the country, this is called Stone Soup, Button Soup, or even Axe Soup.

You can design your potluck around the same principle. If you are going to have your potluck on a particularly cold winter day, ask everyone to contribute part of the makings for a Vegetable Beef Soup. Have them deliver their part a day or two ahead of time. The day of (or the day before), put the soup together and let it simmer. Then, when everyone arrives, you can have a Stone Soup version of the potluck.

It doesn't matter how you choose to have your potluck – semi organized, Stone Soup, or a free for all – there are still a few tips that can help it go smoother. The first one is to always label your dishes. Use a piece of masking tape, write your name on it and stick it on the bottom of your dish (after it is cooked, of course!) This way, if dishes are washed up before you leave, you are sure to return home with your dish.

You may also want to consider bringing plastic containers to put the leftovers in, or to bring home a To Go plate if offered. There is usually so much food at a potluck it's a good chance this will be a bonus for attending.

Be willing to stick around afterwards to help clean up. At most potlucks, dishes are washed by hand in order to return them to the rightful owner. Be ready to have your hands up to your elbows in dishwasher or use a drying towel. And it's not just the dishes. Help the hostess to put her kitchen, dining room, or outdoor area back in order before you leave. It's the courteous thing to do.

Just because money is tight doesn't mean you have to curtail enjoyment and entertainment with friends and family. Instead, make it affordable for everyone by having a potluck meal. It's not only fun and delicious, but you might just finally talk your neighbor out of her super-secret family recipe.

If you want to learn more about the topic at hand, or get a transcript for this episode, just visit my website at www.thefarmwife.com/podcast. That is the Resource page for this podcast and I have it set up by episodes to make things easier to find. To help you out, this is Episode 28.

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If you have questions or need a suggestion or recipe for your own potluck, stop by for an email visit at thevirtualporch@gmail.com. I would love to visit with you more! And be sure to subscribe – you don't want to miss a single conversation. I'll be sitting on the porch every Monday morning waiting for your visit!

Thanks again for stopping in. I will see you next week on Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View. And while you are waiting on the next episode, grab that glass of refreshment, pull up a rocker, and sit back for a while. It's time to

Relax & Enjoy!

julie