

Cooking for a Crowd? Need Large Quantity Recipes? Why Not Create Your Own?

It is often hard to find just the right large quantity recipe for the theme of your party or for the "culinary experience" you are aspiring to offer your guests. Here are a few tips and suggestions on how to modify your favorite 4-6 serving recipes when you find yourself cooking for a crowd of 20 or more.

What constitutes a crowd? Of course it's all relative (your relatives, not mine). Seriously, if you are accustomed to cooking for one to three, cooking for 20-50 people may seem overwhelming. When cooking for a crowd, there are three important considerations; adequate cookware, sufficient refrigerator space and recipe selection.

Obviously you should seek out recipes geared towards feeding a crowd. It is often easy to find large quantity recipes for basic dishes such as lasagna and mashed potatoes. But what do you do if you have your heart set on using your favorite 4-serving recipe for Corn and Black Bean Polenta for a party of 25?

Even for expert cooks, modifying a recipe for large quantity cooking is not just a matter of endless multiplications. If you expand a recipe too much--you are bound to run into trouble and end up with an off tasting or a poorly flavored dish.

For a basic dish like mashed potatoes, it would be acceptable to multiply all of the ingredients in a 4-serving recipe by two, thus doubling the recipe to serve 8. However, recipes are not indefinitely expandable (or shrinkable for that matter) and enlarging a recipe any more than 2-4 times is not recommended.

You may also use recipe converters which are easily found online. The converters however, simply "do the math", multiplying each ingredient amount by the increased number of servings you enter into the converter. It does not take into account, for example, the pungency or texture of the ingredients. If a 4-serving recipe calls for 1 tablespoon of finely chopped rosemary and you want to triple the recipe to serve 12; 3 tablespoons of rosemary will probably overwhelm all the other flavors and seasonings in the dish.

It is a good idea to be cautious when multiplying ingredients like salt, flour, cornstarch, eggs, seafood, meats, robust herbs, oils, onions, garlic, celery and peppers. Some ingredients will impart enough flavor, texture or body when only increased a fraction. In addition some of these ingredients can be added a little at a time as you continually check for taste.

What if you want to serve 25 people with a not-so-simple, 4-serving recipe with numerous ingredients? Doubling or tripling more complex recipes could get complicated. One trick is to batch cook. Batch cooking requires planning ahead and cooking in advance. It may also mean freezing prepared dishes. It is also a matter of "doing the math".

To serve 25 with a 4-serving recipe, you can cook 5-6 individual batches of that recipe or, you can expand the recipe (no more than 2-4 times) and cook in batches accordingly. For example, to serve 25 from a 4-serving recipe, double the recipe to 8 and cook three batches or, triple it and cook two batches. To serve 18 with a 6-serving recipe, cook it three times or cook one 6-serving batch and one batch that has been doubled to serve 12. You get the idea.

It is almost impossible to double or triple recipe ingredients for cakes, cookies, pie dough, or breads, without meeting with utter disaster. It's a chemistry thing. Instead, prepare a single batch repeatedly until you have enough food to feed your guests. Again, cooking in advance is the key.

Chances are you can successfully double or triple the ingredients of recipes for individual appetizers, such as stuffed mushrooms or crostini; and for snack mixes, dips, salsas, punches, one serving-size pieces of meat, poultry or fish, tossed salads, pasta salads and vegetables dishes.

If you are cooking for a crowd of 25 or more you will most likely serve buffet style. It is the best way to serve larger

crowds. On a buffet of numerous dishes, people will take smaller portions of each in order to sample everything. Also, not everyone will sample every dish. This means that every dish you prepare need not serve 25. You need only prepare a few large quantity dishes. Look for recipes that serve 8-12 and double them (or not).

With a calculator and a little ingredient know-how you can comfortably convert most of your party food recipes and present a tantalizing menu to your guests.

Have fun!

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Short note about the author

Debra Haydel is the publisher of <http://www.chef-menus.com>. This site is packed with information and tips on party menu planning. Visit the website to view not only recipes, but complete and coordinated seasonal menus for all special occasions. Learn more about cooking for a crowd and preparing tasty party food that is "A Flavor Full Experience".

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