

The Seattle Times



Wednesday, October 24, 2007

FOOD & Wine



PUT SOME BOO IN YOUR FOOD

TIPS FOR THROWING
A FANTASTICALLY
FRIGHTFUL FEST
(HINT: THE DEVIL'S
IN THE DETAILS)

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Halloween and candy go hand in hand. But Frank Percival associates a different food with Oct. 31: "Picky nibbles," his term for "anything you can eat while balancing a cocktail in one hand" during one of his and partner Mark Wall's costume parties.

"We would borrow shamelessly from the Martha Stewart magazine," Percival said. "Deviled egg trays that look like devil eggs. Finger sandwiches that look like fingers. Cakes that were bleeding."

Halloween lacks the standard cuisine of the more protein-centric American holidays, like

Thanksgiving or Easter. Instead, it's a chance to get creative, to disguise food much the same as we disguise ourselves. And thus, peeled grapes (eyeballs) and blood oranges combine for a creepier fruit salad, cheese fondue goes ghoulish with green food coloring and all manner of candy gummi creatures become fair game as garnishes.

"Halloween has more of a relaxing, party feel to it rather than just being so rigid and traditional and having these strict guidelines about what you have to do," said Vanessa Johns-Webster, director of Seattle's Blue Ribbon Cooking & Culinary Center, which hosts a family cooking class each Halloween.

We've included a variety of recipes for fun, tasty treats and gathered some advice from party planners, caterers and big fans of the holiday to help make your celebration spooktacular.

ALL AGES

• First off, pick a theme for your party, whether a topic (people in the news), nostalgia (the costume you wish you'd thought of as a kid), a time period (the stone age) or something out of left field (things you'd find in a restaurant). It will make it easier to decorate, plan the food,
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Tips for throwing a fantastic, frightful fest

pick out a good soundtrack and help guests know how to dress. One year, Percival's entire family dressed as the cast of "Young Frankenstein." Caterer and restaurateur Lisa Dupar is attending a party whose theme is the color red. She's still figuring out her costume.

- Stick with the food you know, and figure out how to make it fit the theme to avoid cooking disasters, advises Johns-Webster. Make a food more "Halloweenie" with orange, black, purple or red food coloring, or by decorating with plastic ghosts or goblins. Add almond slice "fingernails" to breadsticks. Or, get creative with your serveware. HOLLOWED-OUT pumpkins work well as soup tureens. Use black, orange or green plates, or silver platters atop a nest of fake cobwebs for a fun look.

- Label all your food and beverages so everyone gets the joke. This is how spaghetti and meatballs becomes "brains and eyeballs" in a jiffy.

YOUNGER CHILDREN

- Dupar's catering company has used holiday cookie cutters to shape grilled-cheese sandwiches into ghosts, witches and pumpkins. Serve with tomato soup.

- Set up pumpkin bowling in your yard. A nice, round pumpkin serves as the ball. Upside-down plastic cups or tall butternut squashes serve as pins. Paint or tape on numbers, and tally up scores after two turns to pick your winner.

TEENS

- Get them mingling in the kitchen for a Halloween cookie bake-off with prizes.

- Remember those with braces when planning the spread, and include some items they can enjoy. Some no-nos from the American Association of Orthodontics: hard candies, chewy candies, caramel, nuts, licorice, taffy, jelly beans, bubble-gum.

- Have a bunch of picky eaters? Many Northwest Papa Murphy's locations are offering jack-o'-lantern-shaped pizzas with pepperoni grins. Otherwise, offer a spread of submarine sandwiches, chips and cut-up fruit and veggies to combat all that candy.

ADULTS

- Serve pumpkin ale or other festive

brews, or whip up bloody marys or other cocktails that fit your theme (visit Food Network's "Holidays & Parties" page, www.foodnetwork.com) for more imbibable and edible inspiration.

- Though it's an awful lot of fun, not all Halloween food must be campy. Cook up a pretty mushroom dish, a curried pumpkin peanut soup or serve chunky salsas and let your décor (rather than the food) scream Halloween.

- Visit a local farm stand or farmers market to craft dishes from seasonal ingredients. Or spice up old standbys like caramel corn with pumpkin-pie spice, says caterer and restaurateur Dupar.

- Consider other times of day for your celebration. Party City suggests a Halloween brunch, complete with pumpkin or "boo!"-berry pancakes topped with whipped cream "ghosts," cranberry "blood" juice and spiced cinnamon coffee.

- A smart host considers how guests will return home safely, says Sean Wheatley of Seattle Parties. Consider setting up designated drivers, listing cab companies at the door or renting a party bus or other transportation to get people home. And don't forget to offer some nonalcoholic choices in your punch bowl.

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