

Make Your Own Edible Centerpieces

Member Handout

Nearly every celebration in our culture involves food of some kind. Food selections on these special occasions are attractive and tasty, but often these favorites contain high levels of fat, sugar, and sodium. While we may wish to offer healthier choices to family and friends, the presentation of a bowl of fruit may seem too plain for a party. Why not simultaneously add to the festive atmosphere and offer a healthful choice with your own beautiful edible centerpiece? Your friends and family will be impressed when they learn that you made it yourself.

In this lesson, you will learn

- to determine how many servings of fruit you should eat each day
- to identify some benefits of increased fruit consumption
- to select fruit for edible centerpieces
- to make a pineapple flower
- the procedure for constructing a simple fruit centerpiece

The lesson begins with a review of nutrition information and examine the selection process for fruit to be used in an edible centerpiece. Next, you'll see the procedure for creating the elements of the arrangement such as pineapple flowers and grape skewers and learn how to use them to construct a simple fruit centerpiece. Finally, proper food handling techniques and storage of edible centerpieces will be included.

Nutrition information

MyPyramid.gov recommends that adults following a 2000 calorie reference diet consume 4 servings (2 cups) of fruit daily. USDA data indicates that Americans fall short of that goal, consuming less than half of the recommended amount of fruit each day. You can get a personalized plan by visiting the web page at www.mypyramid.gov.

Fruit provides important nutrients and dietary fiber to the body. A diet rich in fruits and vegetables may reduce the risk for several chronic diseases, including stroke, type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, and kidney stones. Fruit is low in calories, and may help to lower calorie intake when eaten in place of other higher calorie foods. Fruit and vegetable consumption is also thought to play a role in the prevention of certain cancers, such as mouth, stomach, and colon-rectum cancer.

Selecting Supplies and Ingredients

How do you choose the best fruit for an edible centerpiece? When choosing ingredients for your centerpieces look for firm fruit turn brown when exposed to air. Fruit suitable for inclusion in your arrangement would include grapes, fresh pineapple, strawberries, cantaloupe, and orange wedges. Bananas, peaches, nectarines, and apples are less desirable choices due to their tendency to brown. Head lettuce such as iceberg makes a good base for the arrangement, while kale or another curly lettuce makes a nice background or filler for your arrangement.

Containers with straight, deep sides work best for edible arrangements. Unless your arrangement is designed in such a way as to be attractive on the bottom, clear glass may not be the best choice. Baskets lined with plastic liners or bags can also serve as suitable containers.

Additional supplies you will need include sharp knives, cutting boards, bamboo skewers, flower shaped cookie cutters, a melon baller, and kitchen shears.

Procedure

Before beginning, wash fruit and gently pat it dry.

1. Prepare Cantaloupe Wedges

Seed, peel, and cut the cantaloupe into wedges. Place one wedge on a skewer with the more pointed end up. Orange wedges may be substituted when cantaloupe is not in season.

2. Prepare Melon Balls

Use the melon baller to make melon balls and set them aside for use as centers in the pineapple flowers.

3. Prepare pineapple flowers

A pineapple flower requires several steps.

Slice a fresh pineapple into 3/4" slices.

Center a flower cookie cutter over a pineapple slice and press down to cut through the pineapple.

Thread a grape onto a skewer.

Center the pineapple cutout on top of the grapes, leaving 3/8" of skewer exposed.

Place melon ball on top of pineapple slice, using the remaining 3/8" of exposed skewer to secure it.

4. Prepare grape and strawberry skewers

Other skewers can be filled with several grapes, or a combination of grapes topped with strawberries. The strawberries can also be placed on shorter skewers alone. Strawberries need not be hulled before placing on the skewer.

Most arrangements will require some variety in the length of the skewers to create a visually pleasing arrangement. Good kitchen shears can be used to cut skewers to the desired length at the bottom of the stick. Please note that cutting is done at the bottom, where the skewers will be placed into the head of lettuce for arranging so that no splinters will occur in the fruit.

Construct the arrangement by placing head lettuce into the container and topping with kale. Starting at the edge, poke the shortest skewers into the head of lettuce. Continue to add skewers in circular rows, and then add the longest skewers to add height to the arrangement in a way that is pleasing to you.

Food Safety and Storage

Safe food handling of your fruit and vegetables begins at the grocery store. Be sure you keep fresh fruit and vegetables separate from raw beef, poultry, fish, and seafood in the shopping cart and in your shopping bags, since blood and juices from these foods may contain pathogens that could contaminate the produce. Household chemicals should also be kept separate from produce in the cart and in your bags.

Once home, store fruit and vegetables in containers off of the floor and away from household cleaning products in a cool, dark place. Do not wash your produce items before you are ready to use them.

When you are ready to use your produce items, wash all whole fruit and vegetables in clean running water before preparing them, even if the skin or rind will not be eaten. Firm produce such as melons, should be scrubbed with a clean, sanitized vegetable brush. Berries and greens may be placed in a clean colander under running water to clean.

Once peeled or cut, fruit and vegetables should be immediately stored in the refrigerator at or below 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Use a refrigerator thermometer to check the temperature of your refrigerator.

How can you ensure that your edible centerpiece will be adequately refrigerated? One method would be to prepare the fruit skewers and refrigerate them in covered containers until shortly before serving time. Alternatively, a finished arrangement may be wrapped in food grade plastic wrap and refrigerated in its entirety.

When preparing and serving fresh fruit, remember that the serving time plus all handling time at room temperature should not exceed two hours total. Food that is left at room temperature for more than two hours should be thrown out.

Conclusion

An edible centerpiece can add fun and flair to your table and encourage your friends and family to consume the 2 cups of fruit and 2 ½ cups of vegetables recommended on a daily basis. Nutrients in fruit and vegetables contribute to healthy bones, gums, skin, teeth, and hair, lower blood cholesterol levels, and help maintain regularity.

Remember the steps when constructing your edible arrangements:

Wash fruit and vegetables in clear running water and gently pat dry.

Prepare skewers and arrange in clean containers.

Refrigerate promptly until serving.

Throw away any fruit or vegetables that are left at room temperature for more than two hours.

References:

MyPyramid.gov

Safe Handling of Fruits and Vegetables, Peggy Van Laanen and Amanda Scott, Texas Cooperative Extension

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