



Plating Tips for Your Congregate Meals Program

The Importance of Plating for Congregate Meals

Plating adds value to the dining experience. An attractively-plated meal is more appetizing to diners and sends a message of quality that words can't express. **It tells people that you care about your craft and want them to enjoy their meals as much as you enjoyed preparing their meals.** Good plating can lead to increased participation, support the creativity of the kitchen staff and chefs, and set a positive tone for dining; you can use images of your meals to create marketing materials for promotion on flyers, social media, and online. The ultimate goal of enhancing satisfaction is to increase the potential for repeat participants because they see its value.

Key Presentation Factors to Consider

- **Color:** Color is an easy way to achieve beautiful plating. **Multiple colors are more appealing to the eye.** You can add color using fresh herbs and small edible garnishes.
- **Arrangement:** Don't overcrowd a plate—this can be overwhelming. Try to create height with tactics such as laying chicken on top of veggies, rice, or pasta. **If budget is not a problem, get rid of compartmentalized plates and opt for round plates.** This immediately elevates the meal by getting away from the "lunch program" look.
- **Texture:** Texture can increase meal satisfaction and takes two forms. One is the way food feels in the mouth: soft, firm, or crunchy. Second is the exterior appearance of a food. **As with flavor and color, variety is key.** Food presented together on a plate should be balanced in texture.

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