

Period Potluck Contributions That Require No Cooking by Lady Eulalia de Ravenfeld

Not everyone likes to cook, and even those of us who do do not always have time. Here are just a few suggestions of easy contributions to SCA potluck feasts that require no cooking and minimal preparation but are more authentic than brownies and fried chicken.

A quick reminder: provide an appropriate serving utensil with whatever you bring, transfer your contribution to a period container, and remember to label what you bring with ingredients. (An easy way to do this when you aren't cooking from scratch is to cut off the ingredient label of whatever you brought and put it next to your dish.)

Desserts

Candied ginger can be found at Trader Joes and at New Seasons / Wild Oats / Whole Foods (henceforth collectively noted as NFMM: Natural Food Mega Marts).

Nuts: choose medieval (hazelnuts, walnuts, almonds, pine nuts) over modern (cashews, pecans, macadamia). Roasted and salted nuts are fine, but avoid flavored ones.

Try dried fruits, like apricots, figs, or dates.

If you absolutely *must* bring cookies, at least get shortbread instead of chocolate chip.

Cheese

Cheese is a great potluck contribution, but there are some pitfalls. First, processed cheese-like product is *right out*, as is anything with modern additives, that is, no pepper jack please. Try to avoid Giant Orange Block. Tillamook makes some nice white cheddar if you want something easy to find and not cripplingly expensive. Trader Joe's has a broad selection of cheeses, including Armenian string cheese and fresh mozzarella. If you want cheese in quantity, go to Costco – they have brie, chevre, gouda, and more and the prices are predictably reasonable. If you are really ambitious, try the cheese department at your favorite NFMM. I can guarantee that they will have extremely helpful employees who may even be able to tell you about the history of various cheeses (the only pitfall is that their cheeses can be quite expensive).

Bread

Please, no Wonder Bread. In fact, stay away from pre-sliced bread in general (okay, with one exception: Trader Joe's has this wonderful sliced cracked wheat sourdough which is really tasty and reasonably period), but do remember to slice whatever you bring before plonking it on the table. Safeway French and sourdough breads are all right, but if you want something a little fancier try a bakery our your favorite NFMM – I've found some really great fancy artisan loaves at New Seasons, including a whole-grain loaf leavened with starter instead of commercial yeast. So authentic! Again, avoid modern additives like peppers and tomatoes.

Fruits and Vegetables

For fruit, modern potluck guidelines apply: wash whatever you bring, and pick something that is easy to eat. Cut oranges or melons (cantaloupe is the closest to period melons, or try some of the fancier musk melon varieties at the farmers market), whole apples, pears, plums, or apricots, and grapes are all good choices depending on the season (one hint for serving grapes: take some kitchen scissors and cut the stems strategically to end up with small bunches of grapes rather than one massive heap).

Salad is easy to make, and made even easier and fancier when you buy pre-bagged (or boxed: Costco has a large box by Earthbound Organics that is a good size for a group) greens mixes. Toss with some olive oil and vinegar (red wine or balsamic), a little pepper, and some parmesan or romano cheese. If you want to get fancy, add some pine nuts.

Other

Hard boiled eggs are easy and inexpensive. Technically they require cooking, but at least it is easy cooking. If you want to fancy them up a little, bring some dijon mustard to go with them.

Olives are tasty and can be found in a wide array besides "giant". Try kalamata or garlic-stuffed green ones (both can be found at Trader Joes for reasonable prices). If you feel like spending a lot of money, look at the olive bar at your local NFMM; they often have some really nifty varieties.