

Preparing for your Passover Seder Banquet

with Justin Kron

If you've decided to take on the adventure of preparing a traditional Passover meal to go along with ***The Passover Experience*** (also see instructions on how to set up the head table and participant tables for the Seder portion of the program), this document will provide several suggestions for your menu. I am confident that the recipes and tips below will help make your Passover meal as good as the one I would have in my own home.

First of all, if you are not having the meal catered, I recommend shopping at a wholesale store (e.g., Costo's, Sam's, etc.) to help cut down on the cost of serving a large group. During Passover season you should not have a problem finding everything you need. The best places to shop are in areas where there is a Jewish community, but most big-name grocery stores will have a section where traditional Jewish foods are offered, usually labeled "Kosher." You can also buy many of these items on Amazon.

Secondly, to help keep your clean-up simple, I recommend using disposable plates and tableware. Of course, you're always welcome to break out your fine china and silverware like my grandmother did! 😊

Lastly, the menu and recipes below are merely suggestions based on a traditional menu; they are *not* requirements. You can serve anything you want, although I don't recommend serving anything with leaven/yeast in it, since that is the main thing that is restricted during Passover. And if you're expecting Jewish people at your gathering, it is highly recommended that you not serve anything with dairy in it (traditionally meat and dairy products are not served together). If you have any questions about choosing or preparing the recipes below, please don't hesitate to contact me. I will be happy to help guide you (or your caterer) through the process.

Please also note that *The Passover Experience* presentation (aka, *The Seder*) normally takes place *prior* to the meal and runs for approximately 50min-1hr. There is also approximately 15-20min of the Seder presentation that takes place *after* the meal (this is how the Seder is traditionally conducted), so it is important to serve dinner and dessert as quickly and efficiently as possible. You can, however, choose to have the entire Seder presentation prior to or after the meal, but don't go this route unless you have a *really* good reason to do so (e.g. Doing the Seder presentation in the sanctuary for a service and having the meal in a different location or vice-versa). You're also welcome to just do a typical potluck dinner followed by the presentation if doing the more traditional meal seems too cumbersome to pull off.

When serving your meal, you are free to choose "family" or "buffet" style. And if you don't want to use a caterer or cooking team, you might consider divvying up the menu items to various people in your congregation.

Have fun...and feel free to call me if you have any questions!

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Recommended Menu, Recipes, and Serving Suggestions

APPETIZERS

- **Gefilte Fish**—Sold in jars or cans in the Kosher section and served cold. Rinse patties in cold water and quarter them. 1 patty is enough to provide at least 4 people a sufficient taste. Not everyone will be willing to try it, so don't buy more than you need. I recommend putting enough on one plate for people to pass around at the table or a platter of it on the buffet table. Garnish the plate with some fresh parsley and sliced boiled carrots.
- **Chopped Liver**—Some grocery stores have this pre-made in the deli section (highly recommended), otherwise use the following recipe:
 - ½ cup vegetable oil
 - 2 medium-size onions chopped
 - 1 pound chicken liver
 - 2 eggs, hard boiled
 - ¾ teaspoon salt
 - ¼ teaspoon pepper

Pour ¼ cup of oil in a skillet. Add the chopped onions. Sauté until tender and set aside. Add more oil as needed. Add the liver and sauté for 10 minutes or until done (don't over cook them or they will become dry). Using a meat grinder or food processor, grind onions, liver, eggs, salt, and pepper, until fine. The consistency should be thick enough to serve and spread on a cracker. Add some of the oil you used to sauté the liver and onions if the mixture seems dry. Chill in gelatin mold or form into 1-inch balls after the mixture has chilled and serve on a plate, garnished with parsley or lettuce. Serves approximately 10-12. This can be put on the table at the beginning of the meal or on the buffet table and eaten with the matzah bread.

NOTE: Although chopped liver and/or gefilte fish are an acquired taste and can add some additional cost to the menu, I recommend serving one or both of them because they are very traditional foods that are eaten at Passover and I think it is beneficial for people to experience some of the foods that Jewish people are very familiar with. If you decide against serving either, you may want to serve a tossed salad instead.

- **Chicken Soup with Matzah Balls (also spelled “Matzo” or “Matzoh”)**

This is a Passover meal favorite and no Passover dinner is complete without it! You can use the prepared boxed mix labeled “Chicken Soup and Matzah Ball Mix” or you can make your own chicken broth recipe (feel free to include carrots, celery, fresh parsley, and chicken pieces to your chicken broth to add a little extra color and flavor) and simply get the box that is labeled “Matzah Ball Mix.” Just follow the directions carefully on the box and *make sure the chicken broth is boiling before dropping your matzah balls*, otherwise your matzah balls won't get fluffy. They also won't get fluffy if you over-chill your matzah ball mixture. Close to room temperature is best. If you want, you can make your matzah balls well ahead of the gathering. They keep their shape whether they are in the soup or outside of the broth.

MAIN COURSE

- **The Best Passover Roasted Chicken You'll Ever Have**

- 5 pounds of quartered chicken (or boneless chicken breasts, but quartered is preferred)
- 1 large (or 2 small) sliced onion
- ½ cup sliced celery
- 2 tablespoons melted chicken fat or butter
- ¼ cup matzah meal (find in Kosher section) or finely ground matzah bread
- 2 teaspoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- ½ teaspoon ground ginger
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ¾ cup boiling water

Put onion, celery, and butter/chicken fat on the bottom of a roasting pan. Mix matzah meal, paprika, salt, pepper, ginger, garlic, and rub/coat each piece of chicken with the mixture (*Don't worry if you mix in extra seasoning. A little more of less of something isn't going to ruin the recipe*). Place the chicken on the vegetables and roast uncovered at 400 degrees for 30 minutes (20 min if boneless). Lower the heat to 325 and add ¾ cup boiling water for each 5 pounds. Cover the pan *tightly* with a lid or foil and continue cooking for approximately 40 min (or 20 minutes if boneless) or until a meat thermometer reaches 180 degrees. Serve the chicken with the onions and celery and natural gravy for extra flavoring. Approximately one quarter chicken or boneless breast per person.

- **NOTE:** Chicken and/or beef (*not lamb!*) are the traditional main course entrées at Passover. Not only is this recipe for "Passover Roasted Chicken" a Jewish recipe, it may very well be the best roasted chicken you'll ever eat. **If you don't use this recipe, you are definitely welcome to serve your favorite roasted chicken recipe or just get rotisserie chicken at the store.**

- **Beef Brisket That Would Make My Bubbe Proud**

- 4-5 pound beef brisket
- 2 packets of Lipton Onion Soup Mix
- Salt & Pepper

Brown each side of the brisket in a pan on medium-high heat for approximately 3 minutes. Add some kosher salt and pepper to each side while browning. Lay out 4-6 sheets of aluminum foil that will be large enough to wrap the entire brisket. Pour 1 packet of Lipton Onion Soup Mix onto the foil and lay the brisket on it (fatty side up). Pour the other packet on top of the brisket. Wrap the foil around the brisket *very tightly*. Set the brisket (fatty side up) into a baking pan to catch any of the juices that may leak out. Roast the brisket at 475 degrees for 1 hour and then turn down the heat to 325 degrees and roast for another 1-½ to 2 hours (depending on the size of the brisket). Cut into slices using electric knife and serve (feel free to cool the brisket before slicing it and then reheat prior to serving). Try and save as much of the natural juice from the brisket as you can and pour it over the meat before serving.

SIDE DISHES—choose two of the following (Baked potatoes and asparagus are a couple of other options not listed below that can be used for a side dish.)

- **Carrot and Apple Tzimmes**

- 4 cups grated or sliced carrots
- ¾ cups grated or diced chunks of apple
- ¼ cup raisins and/or craisins
- ½ cup water
- 2 tablespoons butter
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon nutmeg
- ¼ teaspoon cinnamon

Combine all ingredients in a saucepan and cover with lid. Cook over low heat approximately 1 hour until it is softened. Stir occasionally. Serves 8-10.

- **Sweet Buttered Carrots** (The above recipe is more traditional, but a lot of people prefer the simplicity and taste of this one)

- 1 pound or 2 cups of cut and peeled baby carrots
- 2 tablespoons craisins
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon butter
- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup of peeled apple chunks **(optional)**

Boil carrots (and apple chunks) until tender. Drain. Roll in craisins, margarine, brown sugar, and salt. Serves 6-8.

- **Parsley Potatoes**

- 1-2 peeled Russet potatoes or 3-4 unpeeled baby red or white potatoes per person depending on the size
- 1 teaspoon butter per potato
- ½ - 1 teaspoon chopped parsley per potato
- Kosher salt and ground pepper

Peel and cut potatoes into pieces or keep them whole depending on what kind you're using. Boil them in salted water until tender and drain. Roll in butter and parsley, and salt and pepper to taste.

- **Roasted Red Potatoes**

- 3 pounds of small-medium size red potatoes (or similar)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 packet of Lipton Onion Soup Mix

Halve potatoes if they're medium size. Coat the potatoes with olive oil and Lipton Onion Soup Mix. Bake in covered pan at 350 degrees for 1 to 1-¼ hours or until potatoes are tender. Serve 2-3 potatoes/per person.

DESSERT—choose one or two of the following

- **Strawberry Sponge Cake**

Use your favorite recipe or a box mix. Serve with Cool Whip (or another *non-dairy* substitute)

- **Dried Fruit Compote**

- 4 pounds Dried Mixed Fruit
- 1-½ cups Orange Juice (pulp free)
- 1-½ cups Water
- ½ cup Sugar

For the dried fruit you can use any combination of prunes, apricots, apples, peaches, pears, figs, etc. Place the dried fruits in a large bowl and cover with boiling water. Let sit for about an hour and then drain. Place the fruit in a large pot with the other ingredients and bring to a boil, lower heat and then let simmer gently for 30 minutes. Let cool and refrigerate in syrup until time to serve. Serves 10-12.

- **Macaroons**

Use your favorite recipe or buy them pre-packaged

BEVERAGES

- Serve coffee, iced tea, water, and/or grape juice at your discretion.

NOTE: We do not recommend serving soda, as it is custom within the Jewish community to refrain from drinking anything containing corn syrup sweetener during Passover, as corn is considered to be a leavening agent (anything with natural sugar is fine). It is also customary not to serve natural dairy products, as many Jewish people refrain from eating dairy at the same meal with meat, but since you're not going to be having any strict kosher keeping Jews at your gathering, don't worry about using butter in your recipes or providing real cream if you serve coffee.

Bon Appetit!