

Easy Dinner Parties

by Wondermom Wannabe - Thursday, February 21, 2013

<http://wondermomwannabe.com/easy-dinner-parties/>

If you aren't a complete shut-in, you have certainly found yourself in the position of being required to host a dinner party. Certain jobs and social laws dictate that we grown ups do this occasionally as proof that we possess the requisite skills required to feed and house our families. Our friends and acquaintances like this reassurance that they aren't unwittingly hanging out with someone with a mental disorder.

Here's the thing though. You've got a lot of stuff to do. The daily task of keeping your family fed is eating up (pardon the pun) quite a bit of time as it is. And if you happen to have a teenage son at home, you're spending a pretty penny just keeping your immediate family fed without worrying how you're going to feed a large group of people. For these reasons, I am a strong advocate for easy, affordable dinner parties.

Below are seven dinner party themes that won't take you dozens of hours or hundreds of dollars to host. For each party theme, I will list a variety of options to help with your planning. Some of the options will have an obvious impact on price (e.g. serving steak instead of hamburgers at your backyard BBQ), but I wanted to provide some ideas that are still easy for those of you willing to throw a few more dollars around. Likewise, some of the menu items will be more time-intensive than others, an option for those of you who don't mind spending a little more time on prep.

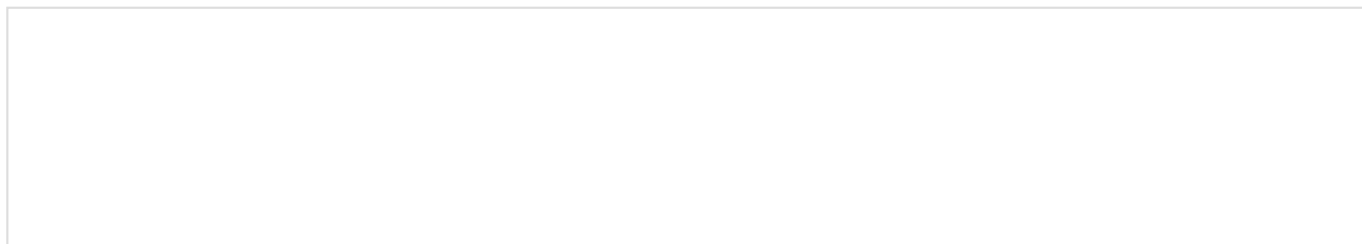
Complete Menu Plans for 7 Easy Dinner Parties



<http://wondermomwannabe.com>

Taco Bar

Who doesn't like tacos? The great thing about this theme is that you really don't have to do much cooking. It's also kid-friendly if you were brave enough to open up your party to younger guests.





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Appetizers

- Tortilla Chips
- [Salsa](#) and/or [Guacamole](#)
- [Queso Dip](#)

Main Dish

- Taco Meat – ground beef, ground turkey, shredded chicken, shredded beef, shredded pork (choose at least one, tailor your other choices to your budget and personal preferences)
- Flour (white and/or whole wheat) and/or Corn Tortillas
- Taco Shells (I recommend Stand N Stuff for ease and convenience)

Toppings

- Shredded Cheddar Cheese
- Shredded Lettuce
- Diced Tomatoes
- Diced Onions
- Sliced Black Olives
- Pico de Gallo
- Salsa (mild and hot)

- Taco Sauce
- Sliced Jalapenos (pickled or fresh)
- Sour Cream
- Guacamole or Sliced Avocado
- Cilantro





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Side Dishes

- [Spanish Rice](#)

- [Refried Beans](#)

Desserts

- [Churros](#)
- [Dulce de Leche Cake](#)

Beverages

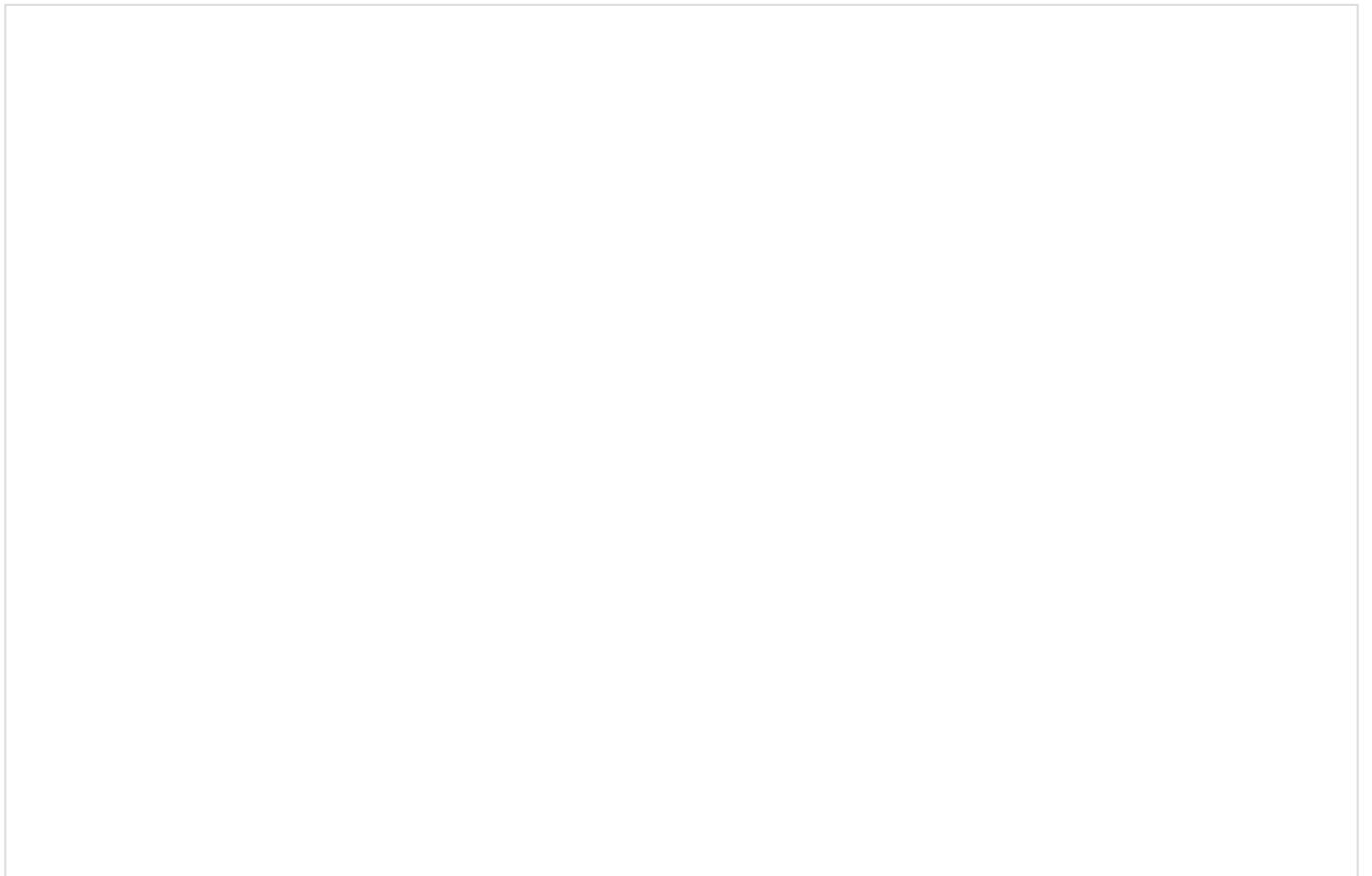
- [Margaritas](#)
- [Sangria](#)
- [Mock-A-Ritas](#)

Italian Dinner

This is a great theme if you are going to have a large number of guests because it's easy and relatively inexpensive to prepare pasta main dishes. This is another kid-friendly theme as well.

Appetizers

- [Antipasto](#)
- [Stuffed Mushrooms](#)





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Main Dish

- [Lasagna](#)
- [Fettucini Alfredo](#)
- [Easy Tortellini with Vodka Sauce](#) or [Ravioli](#) with or without Italian Sausage
- Spaghetti with Meatballs
- [Eggplant](#) or [Chicken Parmesan](#)



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Toppings

- Grated Parmesan
- Crushed Red Pepper
- Fresh Herbs (oregano, basil, and parsley)
- Pesto

Side Dishes

- Salad
- Italian Bread, Breadsticks, and/or Garlic Bread

Dessert

- Cannoli
- Tiramisu

Beverages

- Italian Wine

*Variation: Prepare a variety of pasta and prepare sauces separately so guests can mix and match.

Backyard BBQ

Kid-friendly and your house won't get messed up. The only downside is that this theme is limited to nice weather if you really want to reap its benefits.



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Main Dish

- Steaks or Babyback Ribs
- Chicken Breasts
- Bratwurst
- Hamburgers
- Hot Dogs
- Rolls and Buns

Toppings

- Steak Sauce
- BBQ sauce
- Ketchup
- Mustard
- Mayo
- Relish
- Sauerkraut (for bratwurst)
- Chopped Onions
- Onion Slices
- Pickle Slices
- Tomato Slices
- Cheddar, American, and/or Swiss Cheese

Sides

- Baked Beans
- [Coleslaw](#)
- [Potato Salad](#)
- Corn on the Cob
- Watermelon
- Potato Chips

Dessert

- Ice Cream Sandwiches
- Popsicles
- Cookies
- Brownies

Beverages

- Variety of Beer
- Lemonade
- Iced Tea

Souper Supper

In contrast to the summer BBQ, is the winter Soup Supper. Even if you make one or two more expensive soups (e.g. lobster bisque), the costs associated with this theme will be reasonable.

Main Dish

- [Chili](#)
- [Pumpkin](#) or [Butternut Squash](#)
- [Broccoli Cheddar](#)
- [Chicken Noodle](#)
- [Corn Chowder](#)
- [Chicken Tortilla Soup](#)



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Toppings

- Crumbled Bacon
- Shredded Cheddar Cheese
- Chopped Green Onions
- Sour Cream
- Crackers or Croutons
- Crushed Red Pepper

Sides

- Italian Bread
- Pumpernickel Bread
- Salad

Dessert

- Brownies
- Cookies

Beverages

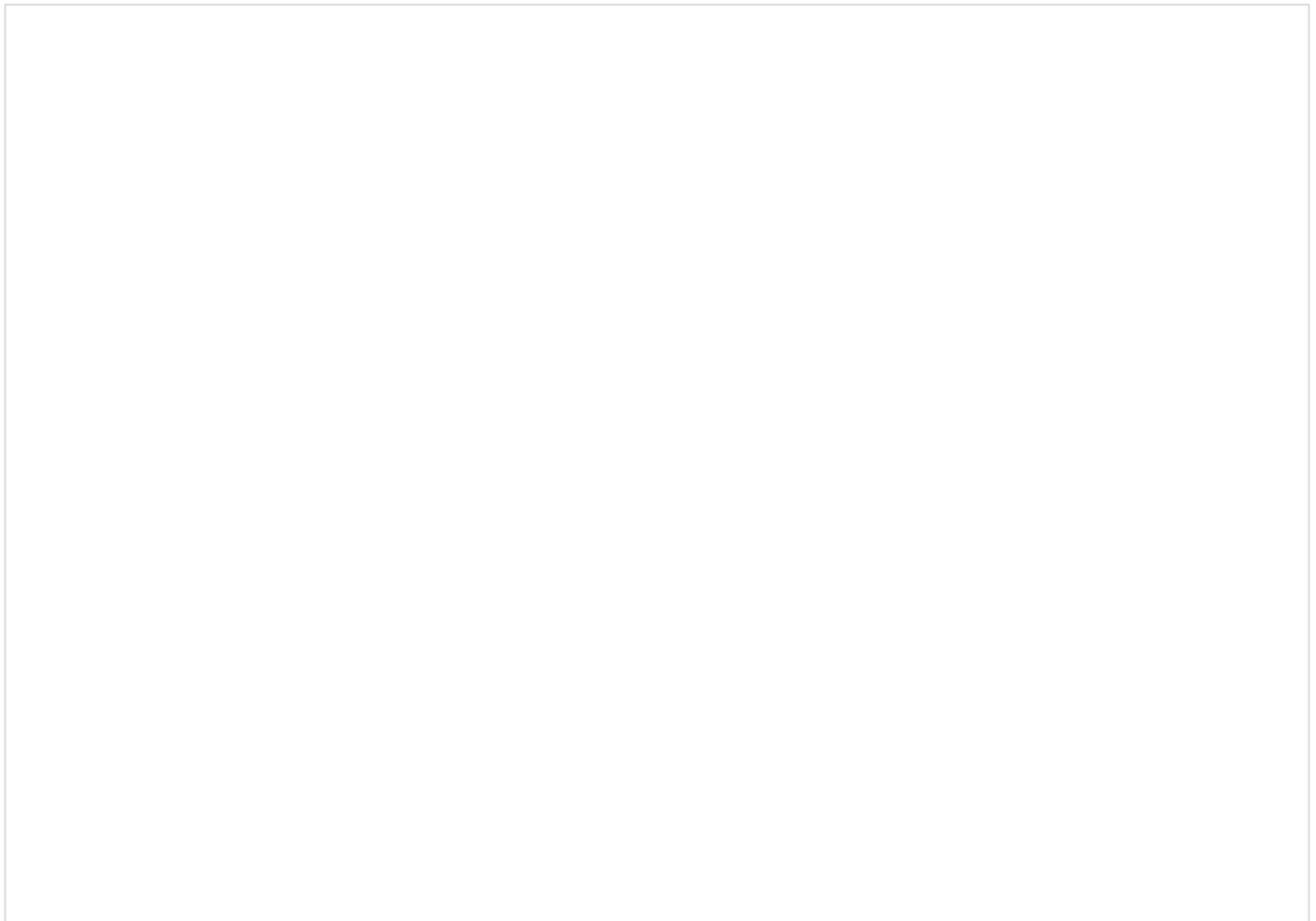
- Wine

Fondue Party

Fondue has made a comeback and for good reasons. It's yummy AND fun. The one drawback is that this theme doesn't work well for large parties unless you have a closet full of fondue pots. Also, even for a small group, you will need at least 3 fondue pots or small crockpots.

Appetizers

- [Cheese Fondue](#)
- Green Apple Slices
- Italian and/or Pumpernickel Bread Cubes
- Fresh Vegetables in Bite-Size Pieces (cauliflower, celery, carrots)





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Main Dish

- Chicken
- Steak
- Shrimp
- [Cooking Broth](#)
- [Dipping Sauces](#)

Side Dishes

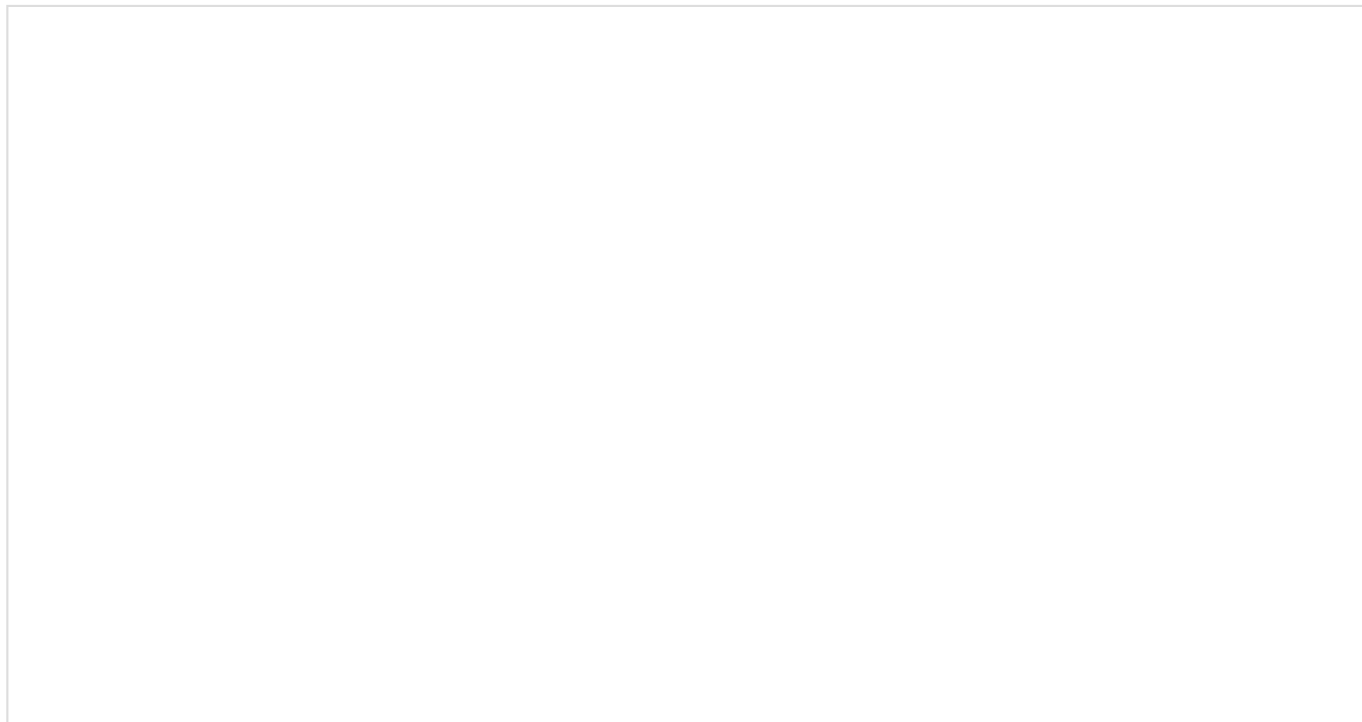
- Roasted Red Potatoes
- Roasted Vegetables (broccoli, cauliflower, asparagus, zucchini, and/or squash)

Dessert

- [Chocolate Fondue](#)
- Strawberries
- Pineapple Chunks
- Pound Cake Cubes
- Large Marshmallows
- Rice Krispy Treats

Clam Bake

Okay, this one can get pricey but it wins hands-down for simplicity. You throw everything in a large pot and boil it. This is ideally an outdoor party, but I am also providing a link to a site that tells you how to do an [indoor version](#).





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Appetizers

- [Clam Chowder](#)
- Shrimp Cocktail

Main Dish

- Lobster or Crab
- Clams
- Mussels
- Corn
- New Potatoes or Red Bliss Potatoes

Side Dishes

- [Hush Puppies](#) or [Cornbread](#)
- Coleslaw
- Watermelon

Dessert

- [Strawberry Shortcake](#)

- [Apple Cobbler](#)

Beverages

- Beer
- Lemonade
- Soda

All Appetizers

Perhaps it's because I don't have appetizers every day that I think they are so wonderful. I personally love parties that serve only appetizers because I can get a much wider variety of flavors and textures than from an entrée and because finger food is somehow just more fun. Admittedly, an all appetizer party is more work than the other party themes I've outlined, but you can cheat with a couple of store-bought options and a couple of dips (easier to put together than several dozen stuffed mushrooms).

Dips

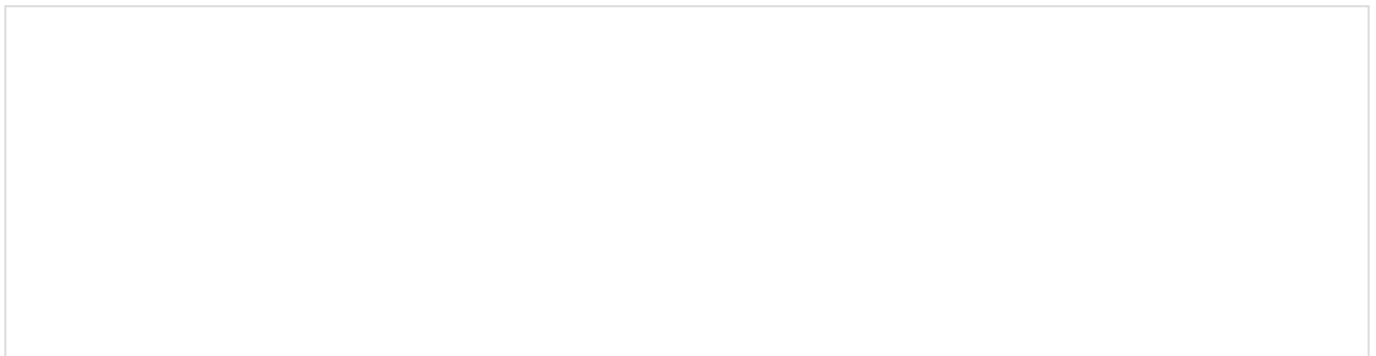
- [Spinach Artichoke Dip](#) with Bread Cubes
- [Fiesta Corn Dip](#) with Tortilla Chips or Fritos
- [Fruit Salsa with Cinnamon Chips](#)

Platters

- Cheese and Crackers
- Vegetable Assortment
- Grapes and Strawberries

Prepared Hot Appetizers

- [Mini Quiches](#)
- [Stuffed Mushrooms](#)
- [Cocktail Meatballs](#)
- [Spinach Cheese Balls](#)





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Prepared Cold Appetizers

- [Caprese Skewers](#)
- [Pinwheels](#)
- [Deviled Eggs](#)
- [Endive Leaves with Goat Cheese and Walnuts](#)
- [Fruit Dip](#) with Fresh Fruit

Desserts

- [Chocolate Covered Strawberries](#)
- [Key Lime Tartlets](#)
- [Oreo Truffles](#)
- [Baklava](#)

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