HOST THOUGHTFULLY 004

Set the Time for Dinner



A CLEAR INVITATION SUPPORTS GOOD SERVICE.

An individually plated dinner needs a shared expectation about when to sit down. Give guests an arrival time and an approximate dinner time so you can coordinate cooking, finishing and service.

1 Give two useful times

Say when to arrive and when you expect to serve. Explain whether there will be an arrival drink or whether guests will sit down soon after arriving.

Why: 'Come at six' alone leaves people guessing how the evening will begin.

2 Plan backward from service

Use the dinner time to schedule the main, plated sides and final garnish. Consult the recipes for cooking and resting requirements rather than inventing a single timetable for every dish.

Why: A clear service target helps the components reach their plates in a deliberate sequence.

3 Respond to a delay clearly

If someone is running late, ask for an updated arrival time and decide how to handle their course. Keep food under appropriate temperature control while adjusting the plan.

Why: A decision is easier to manage than repeatedly postponing the entire meal without knowing why.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

An invitation that explains the plan

'Come around 6:00 for a drink. We will sit down for dinner around 6:45. Nothing to bring.' Add parking or entrance details if they would help.

Before the doorbell

Know when the final cooking must begin and which components can be prepared earlier. Have the plates and finishing tools ready.

When it is time to eat

Let guests know dinner is nearly ready, invite them to the table, then finish plating. Avoid announcing a precise serving moment before checking the food.

Borrow the restaurant principle

Think of the course as a coordinated service: the main, accompaniments and guests should all be ready for the same moment.

THE PLATING MINDSET

Clear timing helps you serve an attractive plated meal while making the evening easy for guests to understand.