

Fall fling.

Take a different spin on entertaining with a festive outdoor party when the rest of the world seems to be heading indoors. Bundle up and enjoy autumn's comfort cuisine.

WITH THE LEAVES CHANGING, THE DAYLIGHT SOFTENING, and a nip in the air, the fall season is a perfect time for a soiree of outdoor proportions. This change of pace will be refreshing to your guests. Provide visitors with food and wine fit for the season, plus some fun extras to keep them warm, and you will have organized a memorable event.

BOLD FARE Warming and hearty foods will get the party started — and keep it going. Easy-to-imbibe soups, such as creamy butternut squash, can be served in glass mugs to avoid utensil fuss. “It’s a good way to serve it because you can wrap your hands around the mug to warm them and it’s easy,” says Nancy Horn, owner of Dish Café and Catering, which catered our party. “This is why a smooth soup works best.”

Simple appetizers also are perfect for an outdoor affair. Mini sandwiches, skewered meats, and cheeses work well. Food that can be eaten easily with potentially cold (or gloved) hands are key. “I recommend wintry bold flavors for the food,” says Horn, who also says protein on the menu is a must. “When it’s cold, people are hungry, and they need long-burning fuels.”

Autumn joy) Clockwise from top left, Nancy Horn, owner of Dish Cafe and Catering, brings out a tasty appetizer; host and Reno interior designer Steve Gunderson shares a laugh with guest Julie McGrath, a McQueen High School teacher; Reno stock broker Eric Broilli and advertising executive Desiree Misanko ladle hot apple cider into a mug; a cheese platter stands ready for guests; Colin U’Ren from Dish Catering serves up cocktails for guests; and a bowl of fall fruit serves as a festive table decoration.



Set the stage! Fabulous touches for a fall party include pumpkins, hay bales, fallen sunflower heads, and large rustic barrels.

Taste

The real fun begins when dessert arrives.

Again, easy-to-eat items are the suggested route for dessert — cookies, truffles, and bars mix nicely with hot apple cider. (See sidebar for suggested menu.)

“If you make the cider on the stove during the day while prepping the event, the whole house will have the aroma,” Horn says. “This really sets the mood when people walk in.”

IN THE DRINK

For those who want a cocktail to warm their soul, there are many options for a cold-weather party. Bennett Lane Cabernet and Maximus were poured by Great Basin Wine Company at our party — these heavier wines were a perfect pairing for the weather and the fare served.

“People can get cozy with these types of reds,” Horn says. “Or a white dessert wine, paired with nice cheeses for dessert, is great in the fall.”

[The '02 Maximus got a 91 and the '02 cab got a 92 in *Wine and Spirits* magazine. Both are available at Whispering Vine and Ben's Fine Wine and Spirits in Reno.]

Another warming option is mulled spiced wine.

“It's the winter version of sangria,” Horn says. “Anything in a big pot that you can ladle out of is always a great party drink.”

GET THE LOOK

While hosts can provide cozy blankets for guests, one sure hit at an outdoor event is a fire pit — a welcome sight to cold partygoers. Fire pits are available for sale at many home and department stores.

For our party, interior designer Steve Gunderson went to a local iron salvage yard and had a yard worker cut down an industrial drum and asked for the lid.

“I buried that in the ground with sand around it,” he explains. “I also got big river cobbles and finished it off. This helps contain the fire.”

This is a concern. Those interested in adding this type of ambiance should consult a professional before building their own. For some fire pit safety tips, visit cityofreno.com/gov/news?newsid=17081.



A successful event! Clockwise from top left, Stacia Topping, an interior design student at University of California, Berkeley and Mark Weaver, a Web/computer specialist for the BLM Ely field office, enjoy wine under the changing leaves; fabulous fall sweets: cupcakes, pumpkin bars, frosted shortbread cookies, and chocolate truffles; and wild mushroom bruschetta.

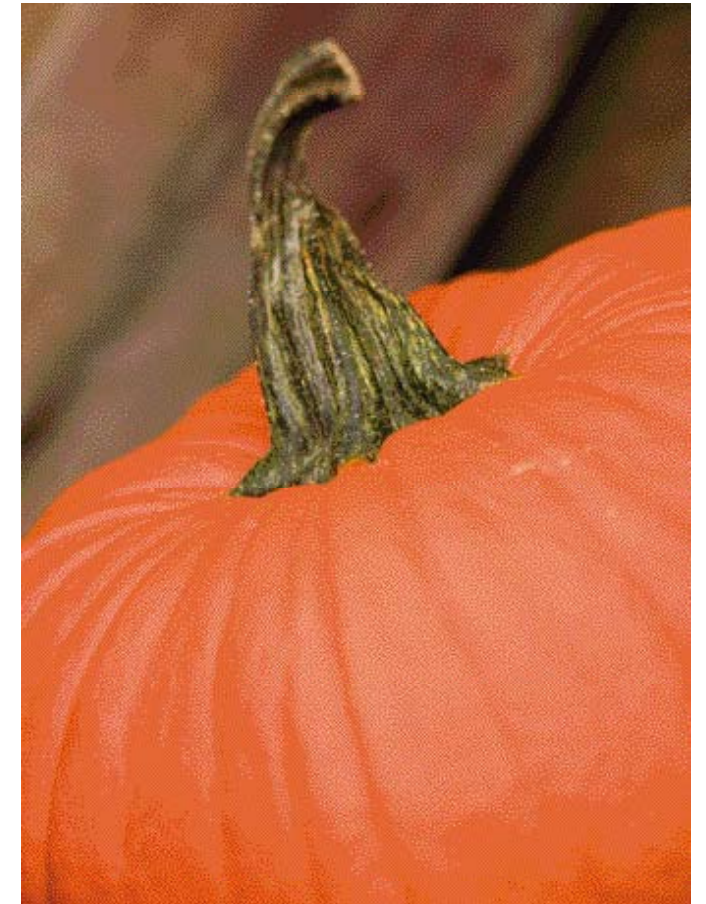


Le Menu

Created by DISH

- n Wild Mushroom Bruschetta
- n Butternut Squash Soup with Ginger, Popcorn, and Sage
- n Mini Turkey Sandwiches with Organic Tart Cherry Jam and Old Cheddar
- n Steak Bites with Bloody Mary Dipping Sauce
- n Yummy Cheese Platter with Assorted Artisan Breads, Pears, Apples, and Grapes
- n Dish Handmade Chocolate Truffles
- n Frosted Shortbread Cookie Cutouts
- n Fall Cupcakes and Pumpkin Bars
- n Hot Apple Cider with Cinnamon

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For décor, Gunderson went for a fall palette. “We used fall color tablecloths and fall flowers, which included horsetail, fall grasses, magnolia leaf — pretty much a dark fall purple color scheme,” says Gunderson, who arranged the flowers himself. He also brought in hay bales, purchased from a local feed store, for seating.

RESOURCES

- Dish Café & Catering, 855 Mill St., 348-8264
- Great Basin Wine Company, 233-8493
- Interiors by Steve Gunderson, 745-9712

Erinn Morgan is a Truckee-based freelance writer whose work has appeared in Manhattan Style, Bike, and Soho Style.



Entertaining done right) Conversations are sparked by an enticing scene and good food and drink.



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