



How to Prepare a Meal for International Students (cheat sheet)

The Joy of a Meal with International Students

Sharing a meal with international students can be a joy. Especially if they are meeting your family and getting to see your home. Most international students are never invited into an American's home during their entire stay in the United States. Welcoming them over for a meal can be an impactful and meaningful way to share life with them. It can give them a positive and warm memory for years to come.

Hosting and Home Environment

And remember, don't overstress that you'll make a mistake. International students in general can be quite accommodating and flexible and forgiving. The key is simply to prepare and share a meal like you normally would do on any night together with the family. International students are less impressed by "showy" meals and dinner table presentation. They don't need a super clean house. Get out of performance mode, and simply have a normal meal; with an invited guest.

Who's Coming for Dinner?

For starters, who are you inviting. Typically, certain cultures, countries and religious backgrounds and effect food preferences and standards. And some individual international students can vary widely from their home food culture. Such as allergies, personal preferences, etc. While this may seem overwhelming, actually it is quite simple. Just ask them ahead of time if there are any foods they prefer not to eat. That's it.

Foods to Stay Away From

There are some typical rules of thumb that tend to work for many international student groups

- Muslims avoid eating pork
- Hindus avoid eating beef, and some are vegetarian altogether (not vegan, just vegetarian)
- Many muslims prefer to eat "Halal" meat, but knowing that it is difficult to find outside of their context, are typically open to non-halal meat, as long as it is not pork. Halal is like Kosher, with an animal butchered and prepared a certain way
- Many East-Asian students dislike raw vegetables. Consider a cooked vegetable dish.

Meal Options and Alternatives

- Many international students find American gravies, overly sweet desserts, cheesy and heavily saucy foods difficult to adapt to. If you are going to serve these, have other foods as well.
- Chicken, fish, vegetable dishes are usually good choices
- Often, having a side pot of unflavored rice, is a helpful go-to filler for other foods
- While students from the Indian Sub-continent are used to hot spicy foods, students from other countries may not be. It helps to ask ahead of time, or tone down the spice level, and leave a side of chili peppers or hot sauce if they want to add it themselves.

Favorite Dishes for International Students

What special dish is part of your family? Start with that. Classics that are fun, filling, generally accepted and memorable:

- Casseroles
- Rice and chicken baked dishes
- Homemade pizza
- Pastas
- BBQ meals from the grill
- Consider asking them to bring a dish or snack to share. A great way for them to feel part of the process

Overall, having a meal with an international student in your home can be one of the most memorable experiences you'll have. It can break down barriers, and allow them and you to dialogue about family, culture, religion, and doing life together. Be sure to make a date to do it again!