



BOO!

host a happening hal loween night

Halloween in my family is basically for the kids. They get dressed up and gather candy while we try to round them up and get something healthy into their bellies. But no matter what, every year we all gather together for dinner.

Some are just neighbors stopping by for a quick bite between houses, others camp out at the door all night passing out treats and some are just looking for a reason to eat candy. The building blocks of a great Halloween night are easy: simple food, festive drinks, and (of course) dessert.

Feeding a crowd that's coming and going all night can be tricky, which is why I like to serve soup and chili straight from the stove. It's always warm, and if more people show up than expected, you can easily stretch it with some chicken broth. Brightly colored bowls are my favorite year round, so I have them in almost every color. Orange is perfect this time of year especially for Halloween. Having a whole stack on hand keeps the party looking festive no matter how many people show up.

Dessert is the best part about any meal – but especially at Halloween. To make it really elegant and inviting, I set up pedestals and covered them with glass cloches to keep the sneezes off. Set up in the bar niche in the kitchen, the elegant display was so inviting that it only looked beautiful while we took pictures. As soon as I turned my back it was almost entirely eaten! Wonderful desserts are simple to make, and the results are totally worth it. While this is the perfect way to spend a Halloween night, it's also a great way to gather friends and neighbors together this fall.

BY ALEXANDRA HEDIN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF HOBSON

>>

INVITE with
Alexandra





the menu

Minestrone Soup

Chili for a Crowd

Boo Beet Salad

Pumpkin Moon Pies

Grandma Leona's Caramel

Homemade Marshmallows

Pumpkin Cookies

Witches' Brew Martinis

Decorate the house while the kids are at school. It's a fun surprise to have the house festive and ready for the party when they come home.

To decorate the house, we always have something fun to bring the silly spirit of the holiday inside. This year I covered the table in orange and yellow striped outdoor fabric.

I made centerpieces out of candy corn that are simple but require a bit of patience, and I used my favorite black candlesticks to add a bit of glamour. Since we all gather in the kitchen to eat, I hung a giant “boo” made out of store-bought letters, black spray paint and black glitter above the kitchen sink.



Candy Corn Ball

- One 4 inch Styrofoam ball
- Two small bags of candy corn
- Styrofoam glue (available at craft stores)
- One clean garden glove (I like the kind with the rubber palms)

Directions: Working in concentric circles, glue the candy corn to the ball. When you run out of Styrofoam to hold onto, wear the garden glove and very carefully hold the already glued candy corn. If your hands are warm or sweaty they will melt the candy.



Chili for a Crowd

I have dozens of chili recipes, but this is my favorite for feeding a lot of people. Using ground beef and sausage helps to cut the cost so you can truly feed the masses. I like plain pork sausage, but if you want it a little spicier, try using a hot Italian sausage.

1 medium onion
 3 cloves garlic
 2 tablespoons butter
 1 to 2 cups beef broth
 1 pound sausage
 2 pounds beef stew meat
 2 bay leaves
 12 ounces Pale Ale
 1 can (8 ounces) garbanzo beans
 1 can (8 ounces) kidney beans
 1 can (8 ounces) pinto beans
 2 cans (9 ounces each) tomato sauce
 3 tablespoons cornmeal
 1 tablespoon sugar
 1 tablespoon cumin
 1/2 cup chili powder
 1/2 tablespoon salt
 1/2 tablespoon pepper
 Olive oil

Directions: In a small bowl, blend together cornmeal, sugar, cumin, salt, pepper, and chili powder. In a warm pan, cook spice-blend with two tablespoons olive oil until aromatic (just a minute or two). Add onions and butter to pan and cook over medium heat until translucent. Add sausage and stew meat and cook, turning often, until browned. When sausage is completely cooked and stew meat cubes are browned on all sides, pour in one cup beef broth to deglaze the pan. Add the second cup, if needed, to retain some liquid in the pan. Pour in tomatoes, beer, beans, and bay leaf and bring to a boil, stirring occasionally. Reduce heat to low and simmer about 3 hours stirring occasionally to prevent sticking until stew meat is tender and flaky. When ready to serve, break up stew meat chunks with a fork and season with salt and pepper if needed. Serve with cheese, sour cream, and fresh chopped onions.





Start the minestrone and the chili first thing in the morning so the flavors have time to meld.



Pumpkin Cookies

1 cup butter
1 cup sugar
1 cup canned pumpkin
2 eggs
1 teaspoon vanilla
2 cups flour
2 tablespoons baking powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
2 teaspoons cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
1/2 teaspoon ginger
1/2 teaspoon cloves

Directions: Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cream the butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Blend in pumpkin, eggs and vanilla and beat until well incorporated. In a separate bowl, combine remaining ingredients. Slowly add dry ingredients to the pumpkin batter with your mixer on low. Don't over-mix. Scoop batter using a 1 ounce ice cream scoop and place on parchment lined baking sheets. Bake for about 10 minutes. Set cookies on parchment paper to cool.

* *To turn into Pumpkin Moon Pies, make marshmallows (I use Martha Stewart's recipe), and use a biscuit cutter to create a marshmallow the same size as the cookie. Dip in melted chocolate and cool on a baking rack. For perfectly melted chocolate, use chocolate candy melts available at craft stores.*

Don't put off planning until the last minute. A few hours spent early in October means you will be ready and excited for Halloween (and not stressed out).



Witch's Brew Martini

Black and orange martinis are a festive – and are surprisingly delicious. They are basically the same beverage (because it's my new favorite drink), and the trick is using black vodka. Blavod (black vodka's brand name) is available at most liquor stores. If yours doesn't carry it, just ask. They will often bring in a case for special requests.

2 ounces vodka (Blavod for black martinis or Absolut Mandarin for orange)

1 ounce pineapple juice

Dash of Cointreau

Ice

Directions: In a martini shaker filled with ice, pour in vodka of choice and juice. Shake vigorously and strain into a martini glass.

Grandma leona's Caramel

My grandmother made loads of cookies and candies – it's where my sweet tooth came from. These are usually for Christmas, but they are so great I like to make them year round. To make them my own, I've added pecans (my favorite).

1 cup butter

2 1/4 cups brown sugar

Pinch of salt

1 cup light corn syrup

15 ounces sweetened condensed milk

1 teaspoon vanilla

1 cup roughly chopped pecans

Directions: Grease the bottom of a jelly roll pan and line with parchment paper. Evenly sprinkle the parchment with pecans. Set aside. Melt butter in a heavy bottomed, 3-quart pan. Mix in brown sugar and salt. Add corn syrup and milk, stirring constantly. Cook over medium heat until a candy thermometer reaches 245 degrees (about 12-15 minutes). Remove from heat, whisk in vanilla and pour into prepared pan. Refrigerate overnight (or eat warm – yum!). To serve, flip pan upside down on a large cutting board. Carefully remove parchment and cut with a large, cold chef's knife. If caramel begins to stick, return to fridge and chill. Wrap 2 inch squares in strips of waxed paper and drop into a large jar or bowl.

resources

Polka dot martini glasses: Rosanna Inc.

Wood pedestals and cloches: Pottery Barn

Black candlesticks: Rosanna Inc.

Orange soup bowls: Anthropologie





Alexandra Hedin is a lifestyle and entertaining expert in the Pacific Northwest. Check out her party-planning ideas in every issue of 425 magazine. Contact her at Alexandra@425magazine.com with tips, party ideas, and comments.