

## Tips on Planning and Cooking a Successful SCA Feast

by Donna Serena da Riva

There is no one way to plan and cook a feast. This class is simply an attempt to pass on some of the tricks and secrets that I have learned during my time working in and running Feast kitchens. The best way for you to learn how to cook an SCA Feast is by working in other peoples kitchens. There has not been a single kitchen that I have worked in that I didn't learn something new. It is also a wonderful way to meet new people and cement fast friendships.

The Feast is a very important part of any event, and it is of the utmost importance that you have an excellent line of communication with the Autocrat. If there is anything you are unsure of, ask! The worst kind of problems arise from simply not communicating and functioning on different assumptions as to what needs to be done. Some Autocrats budget their event so there is a per-head "food cost". If you are under the assumption that the number is the per-head feast budget, only to find out that the Autocrat expects the monies for Breakfast and Traveler's Fare to come out of that budget – well, it can get ugly. Or, since you are at Sam's anyway, the Autocrat assumes that you are purchasing the toilet paper for the entire event – not good.

### Answers you must have from the Autocrat:

When is the event? Where is the Site?

How many people will I be cooking for?

What amount of money will I receive per-head?

Will any other meals be served? Do you already have the additional cooks chosen?

Do I get to choose my own Hall Steward (dedicated to the feast) or have you already asked someone?

Are we expecting Royalty? If not, will there be a Head Table?

Do you have a theme? Is it imperative that I stick to that theme?

Am I in charge of decoration for the Hall or have you already asked someone?

Will anything else be going on in the Feast Hall? When before feast do I get to take it over?

Am I in charge of getting a post-feast clean up crew or will you arrange for that?

After all of these questions are answered, and before you get too far into looking at recipes, it is imperative that you go visit the site. Planning the Feast to fit the strengths of the site is a great deal easier than forcing your Feast to work on the wrong equipment. Taking a good inventory of the site will help you get into the right mindset for the Feast. If the site has a big pizza oven and a convection oven, but only a four burner range, then you know that you need to do a lot of baking and not so much boiling and sautéing. Or, you know going in that you will need to bring a couple of propane powered "turkey fryers" to augment the boiling capabilities of the site.

### On your site visit:

#### The Kitchen

How many ovens are there? Do they all work?

How many eyes are there on the range? Do they all work?

How much refrigeration space is there? How much freezer (if needed)?

Does the site have pots and pans? Count and measure all of them.

Does the site have lids for their pots and pans? Count and measure all of them.

Does the site have baking sheets? Count and measure all of them.

How many baking sheets can fit into the ovens at a time?

Are there roasting pans? Count and measure all of them.

Does the site have cooking spoons, ladles, spatulas etc...? Record all available.

Are there any decent knives on the site? Take an inventory.

Does the site have any specialty equipment such as Convection oven, Large Stand Mixer, Warming Cabinet, Food Processor, etc...? Make note of all available.

Does the site have "Hobart"? If not, make sure you know.

Does the site have any mixing bowls? Count and measure all of them.

Does the site have dry storage shelves? Be aware of its size and your needs.

Are there electrical outlets in the Kitchen? How many circuits are there and where is the breaker box? Are the major appliances on the same circuit?

Does the site have any service gear (plates, bowls, pitchers...)? Take an inventory.

Does the site have standard tableware that can be used for service (spoons, forks, knives...)? Take an inventory.

Is there an Ice Maker? Does it work?

Does the site have any of the large spigot coolers for dispensing drinks? Inventory them.

Is there a steam table? How many wells does it have? Does it actually work?

Are there Steam Table inserts? Count and measure all of them? Do they have lids?

Is there space for plating and servers in the Kitchen or do you need to use some of the hall?

Does the site have plastic serving trays? Get an approximate count (i.e.: few, lots, many).

Does the site have Garbage bags? If not what size do you need to buy for the cans (assuming there are cans!)?

Does the site have a Grill? Charcoal or Gas? How big?

Is there somewhere convenient to put a grill if you need one?

### The Hall

Bring a measuring tape and draw a floor plan of the hall. Taking note of any immovable objects (Coke machine, doors, Ice Makers...)

How many tables are there? Count and measure all of them.

How many chairs are available? Take note of quantity.

Where are the bathrooms? Make notations for hall arrangement.

Can the hall seat the number of people the Autocrat wants?

Make sure to consider all of the feast baskets that will line the walls.

Make sure to leave enough room between the tables for service.

How are the lights arranged and can you turn on only some of them for “mood lighting”?

Does the Kitchen need to be camouflaged from the Hall?

The number one thing that will make the difference between a fun experience in the Kitchen and a horrible experience is the people that are working with you. Once you hit the site, you yourself will be doing very little cooking. You are now the Kitchen manager and it is your job to know exactly what is going on, exactly what everyone is doing, and exactly what the next 3 steps need to be. Without the proper help you are up the proverbial creek without a paddle.

### **Recruiting Help:**

- ◆ Have a Second who will commit to being there the entire time and who knows the feast almost as well as you do. (the “drop dead” contingency).
- ◆ Have a Hall Steward who is in charge of servers and the hall. That is it. They are not in charge of moving tables and chairs for classes, they are not in charge of setting up for revel.
- ◆ Have a separate person to work with/underneath the Hall Steward who is in charge of drinks and drinks only.
- ◆ Do not rely on volunteers to wander in during the day as your sole method of producing the feast. Recruit and arrange ahead of time for at least 75% of your needed workforce.
- ◆ Recruit people who “owe you” because you worked in their feast kitchen. (Owe you is not a good term but the only thing I can think of in this case. I tell people that they earn lackey points for me. They come work in my kitchen and they earn points so that I will come be a lackey in their kitchen. There is no true obligation, just joy at being able to assist another in the same way they assisted you. And if you have never worked in my kitchen, ask me to come work in yours anyway – if at all possible I will.)
- ◆ Recruit at least 2 or 3 people in addition to your Second who will commit to being there pretty much the entire day on the day of the feast. People you trust and that you can put in charge of things you cannot manage directly yourself.

- ◆ Recruit people to be resources. I make sure to have several people who I know have more and/or different experience than myself and rely on them for ideas and assistance when the inevitable emergency occurs.
- ◆ Recruit someone who really, really likes to run the Hobart. Trust me; there will be dishes for days.

### **Thanking your Help:**

If you want to keep people in your kitchen all day, you have to feed them. Make sure to plan an easy lunch (frozen stuff from Sams is always good) and have sodas and drinks available all day.

The best way you can thank your Help is by making sure they have fun. Bring a radio. Try to keep the mood upbeat and positive. Make sure all of your volunteers know how thankful you are that they came to help.

Chocolate helps.

Small tokens of thanks are always appreciated, and can be a memento of a wonderful experience.

Slightly larger tokens are always nice for your 3 – 4 main assistants. You will be relying on them heavily, thank them accordingly. It need not be anything expensive, just heartfelt.

When you are called out into the hall, insist on them coming with you and acknowledge the truth, that you could not have done it without all of the volunteers.

If you are of such a mind, after the knives have gone away, Beer helps.

### **Running a Kitchen:**

Nothing is more important than Safety; Safety in the use of the Kitchen and food Safety alike. Make sure to take a moment with every volunteer that comes through the door to discuss the safety issues in a Kitchen. This is also a good time to let them know how happy you are to have them in your kitchen.

Coming in just slightly behind Safety is Fun. If you aren't having fun, then you are just chopping 40 lbs of onions. And no-one thinks that is fun. You will be under a great deal of stress, but you should not look like it, if you look like you are having fun then everyone else can.

Cross-Contamination, avoid it at all costs. Allergies are not to be messed about with. If it isn't on your published ingredient list, it should not be in the food.

Clean as you go. Most feast kitchens are cramped and short on equipment. As soon as a task is finished, clean up everything that was associated with that task. This will also help with Cross-Contamination.

There is an enormous amount of “stuff” that has to get to site. All of the food, equipment, serving ware ... everything. And it is your job to get it there. Be aware of what needs to get to the site and if necessary arrange for assistance in transportation to (and from) the site. Inevitably you *will* forget something. Do not panic. Make sure that you have directions to the nearest grocery store, big box store, Wally World, gas station... whatever is available in proximity to the site.

### **Items you must bring:**

All of your ingredients

All of your recipes

Good Knives, Measuring Cups (both liquid and dry measure), Measuring Spoons, Long Wooden Stirring Spoons, Meat Thermometers, Oven Thermometers, Good Quality Oven Mitts, Cutting Boards, Sharpie, Hand Soap, Dishwashing Soap, Bleach, Plastic Wrap, Aluminum Foil.

### **Items you might not think you need but that you will be happy you brought:**

Whisks, Wand Blender, Timers, Egg Slicer, Change of Shoes, Can Opener, Corkscrew, Band Aids, Food Processor, Grater, Stick Lighter, Peeler, Masking Tape, Medium sized coolers, Bleach Wipes, Paper Towels, Hand Towels, Funnels, Ziplock Bags, CD Player/Radio.

## **Atlanta Farmers Markets and Food Resources**

Buford Highway Farmers Market: a Pan Asian store, every part of the pig but the oink (literally). They always have pork belly and they even have pre-sliced pork belly for making your own bacon – which is the perfect thing to use if your period recipe calls for “bacon”. Great prices on Ground beef and they have Ox Tails in bulk. Very good bulk rice and exotic spices. I have actually found Isinglass here. The produce can sometimes be cheaper here than DeKalb or Harry’s. This is where I buy my true Cinnamon (Ceylon) in the Hispanic section. They also have good prices on bulk nuts and the cheapest pine nuts I have found.

5600 Buford Highway NE, Atlanta, GA 30340 (770) 455 - 0770

DeKalb Farmers Market: the best selection and prices on high quality produce, excellent fish prices. Expensive for meat, but the best price on Ground Lamb I have found (\$2.99/lb). If you ask at the meat counter you can buy beef fat trimmings for about .20 /lb – great for making sausage. You can find Rose Water, Orange Flower Water, Pomegranate Molasses and Quince Jelly here. If you go to the pastry counter and ask they carry vial and boxed saffron in several different sizes. They frequently have fresh Galingale here! This is also the best place to buy bulk spices.

3000 E. Ponce de Leon Ave, Decatur, GA 30030 (404) 377 - 6400

Harry’s Farmers Markets: sometimes has better case produce prices than DeKalb. Can have more exotic fruits and veggies occasionally (period apples and pears in season). This is the only place I have found to purchase bulk sausage casings to make your own sausage (pork). Meat prices are very expensive, but they actually carry Capons, Quail and Duck with regularity.

70 Powers Ferry Rd SE, Marietta, GA 30067 (770) 971 – 6089

2025 Satellite Blvd, Duluth, GA 30096 (770) 416 - 6900

Leon International Foods: a small Middle Eastern store that is attached to the Premier ME bakery in Atlanta. You can purchase all kinds of exotic spices here and there is an extensive Olive bar. They carry Rose Water, Orange Flower Water, Rose Hip jellies and many other interesting things. If you are doing a ME feast – this is the place for you.

4000 Pleasantdale Rd #A Doraville, GA 30340 (770) 448 - 9190

Taj Mahal Imports: I have found 1 ounce of saffron for \$16.00 here before, that alone is worth the trip. This is also the only place I have found Asafoetida. All kinds of interesting Indian foods for sale here – again, if doing a ME feast this is a good place to go.

1612 Woodcliff Drive NE, Atlanta, GA 30329, (404) 321 - 5940

## **Widespread Retail Groceries**

Sam’s Warehouse Stores: great prices on bulk meats, make sure to ask for Case prices if you need that much. Best place to buy large amounts of dry goods like flour, sugar, dried fruits and nuts. As well as consumables like paper products and cleaning supplies. Best prices for Butter, Eggs, and other “dairy” products.

Ingle’s Supermarket: get their “house discount card” and watch for sales. You can frequently get very good prices on meat, including Buy One Get One free.

Restaurant Food Suppliers such as Cisco can be use to your advantage, check with your local populace for contacts.

If you are interested in cooking period food there is a wealth of resources on the Internet for your use. From academic pages with transcriptions of period manuscripts to SCAers’ own websites with pre-redacted recipes – you can find just about anything. And if you ever have any questions, please feel free to drop me a line at [vox8@mindspring.com](mailto:vox8@mindspring.com)

## **Online Resources**

Stefan’s Florilegium: absolutely indispensable for anything you might want to research in the SCA.

<http://www.florilegium.org/>

The Known World Cooks List: a high traffic list, but a wonderful resource for the historical cook.

<http://www.ansteorra.org/mailman/listinfo/sca-cooks>

### SCA Member websites with Redacted Historical Recipes

Cariadoc's Miscellany

[http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Medieval/miscellany\\_pdf/Miscellany.htm](http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Medieval/miscellany_pdf/Miscellany.htm)

Daniel Meyer's Medieval Cookery

<http://www.medievalcookery.com/index.htm>

Dar Anahita: the Dining Niche

<http://home.earthlink.net/~lilinah/diningniche.html>

Gode Cookery

<http://www.godecookery.com/>

Helewyse de Birkestad

<http://www.geocities.com/helewyse/>

Jehanne de Huguenin

<http://users.iafrica.com/m/me/melissant/cook/cook.htm>

niccolo difrancesco

<http://franiccolo.home.mindspring.com/main.htm>

Serena da Riva

<http://www.serenadariva.com/index.html>

### Primary Source Culinary Manuscripts

Moorish Span – 13<sup>th</sup> Century, *An Anonymous Andalusian Cookbook*

[http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Medieval/Cookbooks/Andalusian/andalusian\\_contents.htm](http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Medieval/Cookbooks/Andalusian/andalusian_contents.htm)

Spain – 16<sup>th</sup> Century, *Libre del Coch*

<http://www.florilegium.org/files/FOOD-MANUSCRIPTS/Guisados1-art.html>

<http://www.florilegium.org/files/FOOD-MANUSCRIPTS/Guisados2-art.html>

English – 1390, *The Forme of Cury*

<http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/foc/>

English – 1420, *Two Fifteenth-Century Cookery-Books*

<http://www.hti.umich.edu/cgi/c/cme/cme-idx?type=HTML&rgn=TEI.2&byte=3356093>

English – 15<sup>th</sup> Century, *Liber Cure Cocorum*

<http://www.pbm.com/%7Elindahl/lcc/>

French – 1393, *Le Ménagier de Paris*

[http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Medieval/Cookbooks/Menagier/Menagier\\_Contents.html](http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Medieval/Cookbooks/Menagier/Menagier_Contents.html)

French – 1300's, *Du fait de cuisine* by Maistre Chiquart

[http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Medieval/Cookbooks/Du\\_Fait\\_de\\_Cuisine/Du\\_fait\\_de\\_Cuisine.html](http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Medieval/Cookbooks/Du_Fait_de_Cuisine/Du_fait_de_Cuisine.html)

Venetian – 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> Century, *Libro di Cucina/Libro per cuco*

<http://www.geocities.com/helewyse/libro.html>

Tuscan – 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> Century, *Anonimo Toscano, Libro della Cucina*

[http://www.geocities.com/anahita\\_whitehorse/LibroDellaCocina.html](http://www.geocities.com/anahita_whitehorse/LibroDellaCocina.html)

German – 1553, *The cookbook of Sabina Welserin*

[http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Medieval/Cookbooks/Sabrina\\_Welserin.html](http://www.daviddfriedman.com/Medieval/Cookbooks/Sabrina_Welserin.html)

German – 1581, *Ein New Kochbuch* by Mark Rumpoldt

[http://clem.mscd.edu/%7Egrasse/GK\\_Rumpolt1.htm](http://clem.mscd.edu/%7Egrasse/GK_Rumpolt1.htm)

### Regarding Spices

Gernot Katzer's Spice Pages: everything you ever wanted to know about all spices.

<http://www.uni-graz.at/~katzer/engl/>

Francesco Sirene, Spicer: where to buy the spices, once you figure out what you need.

<http://www.silk.net/sirene/>