

A TOAST TO THE *Bride*

Tips and sips for the perfect bridal celebration



FAMILY FEATURES

Whether it's an engagement party, bridal shower, the reception or post-wedding brunch, professional event planner Alison Hotchkiss knows a thing or two about creating memorable bridal celebrations. As the founder-owner of Alison Events, and author of "The Destination Wedding Planner: The Ultimate Guide to Planning a Wedding From Afar" (Chronicle Books), she's produced stunning weddings all over the world. Whether you enlist the help of a planner or do it yourself, Alison's tips on entertaining will help you make your bridal celebration picture perfect.



Alison Hotchkiss

- Bubbles add a festive, celebratory note to any bridal celebration. I love Cupcake Prosecco sparkling wine from Italy. It's crisp and refreshing — an affordable alternative to pricey French champagne yet equally delicious.
 - Food doesn't have to be complicated to be remarkable. The finger foods here are varied and flavorful — but they're not hard to make. To satisfy all guest preferences, I always recommend 3 to 5 appetizers including chicken, beef and fish plus two veggie options (ideally one being vegan or dairy free).
 - A signature drink is a fun way to welcome guests and get the party off to a great start. The Prosecco Ginger Cocktail is delicious and memorable. I like to serve it in unconventional glassware and garnish with Persian cucumber "swizzle sticks" for even more impact.
 - A popular alternative to the traditional sit down meal at engagement parties or showers: food stations with a range of different foods offered at each. Pair a different wine with each station to create maximum variety and enjoyment as guests taste and mingle.
 - Factor in overall ambiance and the vibe you want for your wedding or event. Lighting is key. And when it comes to candles, more is more.
 - Flavored vodka is another big trend I'm seeing right now. Look for vodkas infused with such exotic flavors as vanilla frosting, devil's food cake and more. And don't be afraid to mix spirits with wine: One of my favorite concoctions is a blend of lemony Cupcake Chiffon Vodka with muddled blackberries, fresh mint, sparkling grapefruit water and a splash of Cabernet Sauvignon.
 - It's not only more fun to serve bite-sized cupcakes at your wedding but they offer more variety and unexpected flavor combinations than a traditional cake.
 - Be sure to have a good assortment of non-alcoholic beverages on hand as well such as bottled water, soft drinks and more to prevent dehydration and ensure that guests drink responsibly.
- For more tips from Alison for creating a bridal event to remember, visit www.cupcakevineyards.com.

Shrimp Fajitas Salad on Crisp Flour Tortilla Chips

Yield: 12 servings, 2 pieces per serving

- 4 8-inch flour tortillas
- 1 ripe avocado, pitted and peeled
- 1 1/2 teaspoons fresh lime juice
- 1 teaspoon finely chopped cilantro
- 1/2 teaspoon finely chopped jalapeño, or more to taste
- 6 ounces extra small (salad shrimp) cooked and peeled shrimp, chopped (about 1 1/4 cups)
- 3 tablespoons finely chopped peeled ripe mango
- 2 teaspoons finely chopped cilantro
- 1 teaspoon finely chopped jalapeño
- 1 teaspoon fresh lime juice
- 2 tablespoons thin sliced green onion (scallion) tops (garnish)

Preheat oven to 350°F.

Use ruler to trim tortillas into 4 large 6-inch squares. Cut 24 2-inch squares from the squared off tortillas; discard trimmings.

Spray baking sheet with nonstick spray. Arrange tortilla squares on pan and spray with nonstick spray. Bake until toasted golden and crisp, 10 to 12 minutes. Cool.

Purée avocado, lime juice, cilantro and jalapeño in a food processor until smooth. Set aside.

Combine shrimp, mango, cilantro, jalapeño and lime juice in small bowl.

Spread about 1/2 tablespoon avocado mixture in center of each toasted tortilla square. Lightly press a tablespoon of the shrimp salad in center of each. Garnish with scallion slices and serve.

Beet Purée with Sesame Flavors

Yield: 12 servings, 2 pieces per serving

- 1 pound fresh golden or red beets, trimmed, peeled, cut into 1/2-inch pieces
- 24 endive leaves, thick ends trimmed, separated into individual leaves
- 3 tablespoons reduced sodium tamari or soy sauce
- 1/2 teaspoon toasted (dark) sesame oil
- 1/4 teaspoon grated fresh ginger
- 1/4 teaspoon minced fresh garlic
- Salt to taste
- Toasted white sesame seeds (garnish)

Place beets in a steamer and cook, covered, over simmering water, until tender, 15 to 20 minutes. Cool.

Place endive leaves in a large bowl. Add water and a cup of ice and refrigerate until crisped, about 15 minutes. Drain and pat dry with paper towels.

Place tamari or soy sauce in a small saucepan and boil gently until reduced to 1 tablespoon. Cool.

Purée beets, 1 tablespoon reduced tamari or soy sauce, garlic, ginger, sesame oil and salt in food processor until smooth and creamy.

Arrange endive leaves on a platter. With two teaspoons, place a mound of beet purée in the center of each leaf. Garnish with toasted sesame seeds.

Note: Canned or cooked vacuum packed beets can be used as a substitute.

Melted Gruyere Toasts with Crisp Frizzled Prosciutto

Yield: 12 servings, 2 pieces per serving

- Extra virgin olive oil
- 4 slices (about 3 ounces) prosciutto, cut into 1/2-inch pieces
- 24 1/4-inch-thick slices Italian bread
- 4 ounces aged Gruyere, coarsely shredded (about 1 3/4 cups)

Heat 1/2 inch olive oil in medium skillet over medium heat until hot enough to sizzle a piece of prosciutto.

Stir half the prosciutto into hot oil and cook over medium heat until prosciutto is crispy, 2 to 3 minutes. Remove from with a slotted spoon to a side dish. Add remaining prosciutto and cook until crispy. Set aside.

Heat oven to 350°F. Spray baking sheet with nonstick spray and arrange bread slices on tray.

Top each bread slice with a rounded tablespoon of cheese. Bake until cheese is melted, about 5 minutes. Remove from oven.

Stand a crispy piece of prosciutto in the center of each melted mound of hot cheese and serve at once.

Prosecco Ginger Cocktail

Yield: 12 servings, 2 glasses per serving

- 1 1/2 cups water
- 1 cup (6 ounces) crystallized ginger
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 2 bottles (750 ml) Cupcake Prosecco, chilled
- 24 thin diagonal sliced seedless or Persian cucumber

Combine water, ginger and sugar in saucepan and bring to a boil. Simmer on low heat, uncovered, 15 minutes. Off heat let steep, covered, 30 minutes. Cool.

Purée in blender until smooth.

Add 1 tablespoon ginger purée to each champagne glass. Add chilled prosecco, and stir well with swizzle stick until blended. Garnish glass with cucumber slice

50th Wedding Anniversary
Earl & Joyce Stahlecker

Come celebrate with them at the VFW on Saturday, September 3, 2011 at 5:30 - ? Free food and dance. No gifts, please.

We love ya! Cheryl, Robin & Jeff

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