

cooking and entertaining

A Valentine's Day Tea Party

BY JENNIFER CHANDLER/FOOD STYLIST
PHOTOGRAPHY BY NATALIE ROOT





Valentine's Day is not just about flowers and gifts from your sweetheart, it's also about enjoying some sweet moments with your friends as well. It's the perfect holiday to celebrate and enjoy the day to the fullest with your favorite people.

This year, start the tradition of having a Valentine's tea party. Nothing is more indulgent than spending an afternoon with girlfriends at an afternoon tea party with lots of sweet treats. A tea is a great way to entertain for just about any occasion.

Afternoon tea is traditionally a light, elegant meal served between a lunch and a late dinner, usually between 3 o'clock and 5 o'clock. Since it is in the afternoon, your event will not interfere with your friends' plans to spend a romantic evening with their special Valentines. Also because of the time of day, it can be either a casual or a more formal affair.

THE ETIQUETTE OF TRADITIONAL ENGLISH TEA

There are seven variations of traditional English teas. The most popular in America being: Afternoon Tea, Full Tea and Royal Tea.

Afternoon Tea can be served formally or informally with a menu of sandwiches, scones, cookies and special desserts. Full Tea is a complete four-course Afternoon Tea with sandwiches, scones, sweets and a dessert finale. Royal Tea adds a glass of champagne or sherry to the Full Tea.

Don't be afraid to break the rules and mix and match aspects of each tea style. For example, a glass of champagne or a slice of cake make a fun addition to an Afternoon Tea.

Opposite page: Haute Hostess Aprons by Elizabeth Scokin.

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Menu

Chicken salad in phyllo cups

Heart-shaped smoked salmon tea sandwiches

Cucumber and goat cheese tea sandwiches

Scones with raspberry jam and clotted cream

Linzer cookies with raspberry jam

Fresh fruit tartlets

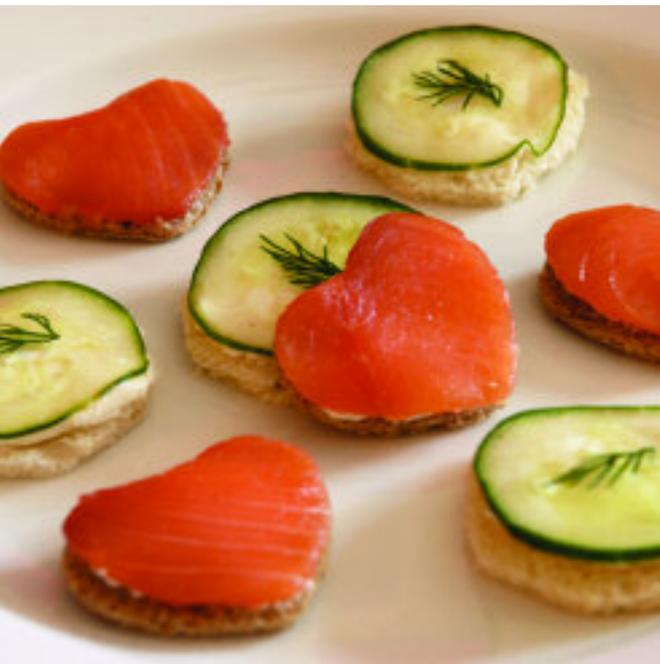
Chocolate cupcakes

Rosé champagne

Tea

PLANNING YOUR TEA PARTY A Step-by-Step Guide

- Select a date, and send out your invitations.
- Purchase your tea and related accessories.
- Plan your menu, including both savory and sweet foods.
- Order any foods that you will not be preparing yourself.
- Grocery shop, and prepare the meal.
- Set a beautiful table.
- Brew a pot of tea.
- Relax, and enjoy your guests.



Keep it simple with chocolate hearts, dainty cookies and tea. Or host a more elaborate soiree that includes serving a traditional pot of tea and fancy tea sandwiches, as well as an array of beverages and treats, including scones, cakes, tarts and homemade butters and jams. Chilled herbal teas add a nice touch for those who don't fancy hot tea. Bubbly rosé champagne adds a festive flair.

The beauty of a tea party is that most of the menu can be prepared ahead of time and served at room temperature. Make the baked goods the night before, and assemble the sandwiches in the morning. Your table can be set up to an hour before your guests arrive making you free to enjoy yourself.

Add a personal touch by making homemade Valentines for your invitations. Easy-to-make, homemade invites are also inexpensive. If hearts don't suit your taste, attach a small note card to a box of chocolates or a long-stemmed rose.

Setting the table is often a favorite part of preparing for a tea-themed event. It's the perfect opportunity to pull out your best china and silver. If serving a crowd or a multitude of guests, gather a collection of stylish and unique tea pots. Folded napkins, candles, flowers, all in Valentine's Day colors, will help create a festive table-scape. Place-cards are a lovely, helpful touch.

For party favors, hand out old-fashioned tea strainers wrapped in Valentine's ribbons. Bags of specialty teas, in particular flowering teas, also make nice treats.



SMOKED SALMON TEA SANDWICHES

Serves 6 to 8

- 1/2 cup whipped cream cheese
- 1/2 tbsp. chopped fresh dill
- 1 tbsp. freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 8 slices extra-thin bread
- 4 oz. smoked salmon

In a small bowl, combine the cream cheese, dill and lemon juice.

Using a small cookie cutter, cut the bread and salmon into desired shape. Thinly spread the cream cheese mixture on the bread slices. Top with salmon. Keep chilled until ready to serve.

CUCUMBER AND GOAT CHEESE TEA SANDWICHES

Serves 12 to 18

- 10 ounces mild goat cheese
- 16 slices extra-thin bread
- 1 hothouse cucumber, not peeled
- Fresh dill

Thinly slice the cucumber. Using a round cookie cutter the same size as the cucumber, cut the bread. Thinly spread the goat cheese on the bread slices. Top with a cucumber slice. Garnish with a sprig of fresh dill. Keep chilled until ready to serve. *

Accessories provided by Macy's.

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