

All-American Diner

Birthday Party Menu — Passport to Flavor

Third Space Kitchen

Welcome to the All-American Diner!

Today you are running a diner. You will form your own slider patties, cut and season a tray of oven fries, blend a milkshake the way a soda fountain does, and decorate a cupcake for the birthday. Every recipe in here is one you actually made, written so you can make it again at home.

By the end of the party you will have practiced:

- Forming and portioning burger patties
- Knife skills, cutting potatoes into even sticks
- Roasting and browning in a hot oven
- Blending a milkshake to the right thickness
- Frosting and decorating a cupcake
- Handling raw meat safely and washing up the right way

Most importantly, you will see that diner food is real cooking. Happy cooking!

— The Third Space Kitchen Team

Three Rules of the Diner

1. Fries go in first. They take the longest, so everything else is built around them.
2. Hands clean, boards separate. Raw beef gets its own board and its own bowl, and hands get washed the moment the patties are done.
3. A chef cooks the beef. You form the patties. An adult cooks them and checks the temperature.

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Kitchen Safety

Before you begin cooking, remember these rules.

Clean Hands

- Wash hands before cooking.
- Wash hands after handling raw meat.
- Wash hands after touching your face or hair.

Knife Safety

- Always use a cutting board.
- Use the claw grip when cutting.
- Carry knives with the blade pointed down.
- Never try to catch a falling knife.

Heat Safety

- Assume pans and sheet trays are hot.
- Use oven mitts.
- Stand back from the flat-top. An adult cooks on it, not you.
- Ask for help around hot equipment.

Raw Meat Safety

- Raw beef gets its own bowl, its own board, and its own utensils.
- Keep it away from anything you eat as it is, like buns, lettuce, and pickles.
- Wash your hands right after forming patties, before you touch anything else.
- Beef patties are cooked to 160F and checked with a thermometer.

Workspace Safety

- Keep your workspace clean.
- Wipe spills right away.
- Put tools back when you finish.
- Walk carefully in the kitchen.

Our kitchens are peanut free and tree nut free.

Good chefs work safely.

Skills You'll Build

Hands and Knife

- Cutting potatoes into even sticks so they cook at the same speed
- Portioning by weight and forming an even patty
- Seasoning evenly from a height

Heat and Browning

- Roasting at high heat so food browns instead of steaming
- Knowing when a tray needs a flip
- Cooking ground beef to a safe temperature

Finishing

- Blending a milkshake to a thickness you can drink
- Frosting a cupcake with an offset spatula
- Building a plate that looks like it came from a diner

Party Menu

The All-American Diner

- Diner Sliders
- Oven Fries, Two Ways
- Diner Milkshakes
- Birthday Cupcakes with Vanilla Buttercream

All-American Diner Recipes

These four recipes are the whole party. Read the ingredients first, gather everything, and cook with an adult whenever there is a knife, an oven, a blender, or a hot cooking surface.

Skills practiced

- Knife skills and even cuts
- Portioning and forming
- High-heat roasting
- Blending and decorating

Diner Sliders

Makes 24 sliders, about 2 each for 10 to 12 people.

Ingredients

- 3 pounds ground beef, 80/20
- 24 slider buns or small potato rolls
- 12 slices American cheese, cut in half
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 2 tablespoons neutral oil for the cooking surface
- 1 head green leaf or iceberg lettuce, leaves separated
- 3 tomatoes, sliced thin
- 1 small red onion, sliced thin
- 1 jar (16 ounces) dill pickle chips
- Ketchup, yellow mustard, and mayonnaise for serving

Instructions

1. Set out a bowl of the cold ground beef, a clean board, and a tray lined with parchment. This is the raw beef station and nothing clean goes on it.
2. Pull off a piece of beef about the size of a golf ball, 2 ounces. A kitchen scale makes this easy and even.
3. Roll it into a ball, then press it flat into a patty about 2 and a half inches across and a half inch thick. Do not squeeze or overwork it. The looser the patty, the juicier the slider.
4. Press your thumb into the middle of each patty to make a shallow dimple. That keeps it from puffing into a dome as it cooks.

5. Lay the patties on the parchment tray without touching each other. Wash your hands with soap and warm water before you touch anything else.
6. An adult heats a flat-top or heavy skillet over medium high heat, adds the oil, and seasons the patties with the salt and pepper right before they go on.
7. An adult cooks the patties about 2 to 3 minutes on the first side, until the edges are brown and crisp, then flips once.
8. After the flip, lay half a slice of cheese on each patty and cook another 2 minutes, until a thermometer pushed into the middle of a patty reads 160F. Ground beef is always cooked to 160F.
9. While the patties cook, split the buns and set up a topping bar with the lettuce, tomato, onion, pickles, and sauces.
10. Toast the cut sides of the buns on the cooking surface for about 30 seconds until golden.
11. Build your slider: bottom bun, patty with melted cheese, toppings you like, sauce, top bun.

Food Science

Ground beef is cooked to 160F for a reason. When a steak is ground, whatever was on the outside gets mixed all the way through, so the middle has to get hot too. A whole steak can be pink in the middle. A burger cannot. The dimple works because meat proteins tighten and shrink as they heat, and the edges pull in faster than the middle, which pushes the center up into a dome. Starting with a dent means it finishes flat.

Oven Fries, Two Ways

Makes enough for 10 to 12 people.

Ingredients

- 5 pounds russet potatoes, about 6 large
- 3 pounds sweet potatoes, about 4 medium
- 1 third cup olive oil for the russets
- 1 quarter cup olive oil for the sweet potatoes
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt, plus more for finishing
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder, optional
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika for the sweet potatoes, optional

Instructions

1. Heat the oven to 425F. Line four sheet pans with parchment.
2. Scrub the russets. You can leave the skin on or peel them.

3. Cut each potato lengthwise into slabs about a quarter inch thick, then cut the slabs into sticks about a quarter inch wide. Even sticks cook evenly, so take your time.
4. Drop the russet sticks into a bowl of cold water as you cut them and let them sit at least 10 minutes. This pulls out loose starch.
5. Drain the russets and dry them well on towels. Wet potatoes steam instead of browning, so this step matters more than it sounds.
6. Toss the dry russets in a bowl with the olive oil, the salt, the pepper, and the garlic powder if you are using it.
7. Peel the sweet potatoes and cut them into sticks the same size. Do not soak these. Toss them in a separate bowl with their oil, the cornstarch, and the paprika. The cornstarch gives them a crisp coat, because sweet potatoes have more sugar and less starch than russets.
8. Spread each kind on its own sheet pans in a single layer with space between the sticks. A crowded pan steams. Use another pan rather than piling them up.
9. An adult puts the pans in the oven. Bake the russets 25 to 35 minutes and the sweet potatoes 20 to 25 minutes.
10. Flip the fries with a spatula about halfway through, when the bottoms are golden.
11. They are done when they are browned at the edges and crisp. Salt them the moment they come out, while they are still hot and glossy.

Food Science

Browning is not burning. At high heat the sugars and proteins on the surface of the potato rearrange into hundreds of new flavor compounds, which is why a browned fry tastes like a fry and a pale one tastes like a boiled potato. That reaction only starts once the surface is dry, which is why we dry the potatoes, why we use one layer, and why a crowded pan gives you soft fries no matter how long you bake them.

Diner Milkshakes

Makes 1 shake. The ratio scales to any number.

Ingredients

- 1 and a half cups vanilla ice cream, about 3 scoops
- 1 half cup whole milk
- 1 mix-in of your choice, from the list below
- Whipped cream and a cherry for the top

Mix-Ins

- 2 tablespoons chocolate syrup
- 3 strawberries, hulled and halved

- 2 sandwich cookies, broken up
- 1 half banana
- 1 tablespoon malt powder
- 2 tablespoons sprinkles

Dairy-Free Version

- 1 and a half cups oat based frozen dessert
- 1 half cup oat milk
- The same mix-ins
- Build it exactly the same way. Only the tub and the carton change.

Instructions

1. Let the ice cream sit on the counter 5 minutes so it is scoopable but not melting.
2. Put the ice cream in the blender first, then the milk, then the mix-in. Three parts frozen to one part liquid is the whole secret.
3. An adult runs the blender on low, then medium, for about 30 to 45 seconds. Stop as soon as it is smooth.
4. Check the thickness. It should pour slowly and hold a ripple. Too thick, add milk a tablespoon at a time. Too thin, add another scoop of ice cream.
5. Pour into a tall glass, top with whipped cream and a cherry, and drink it right away.

Food Science

A milkshake is a balancing act between frozen and liquid. Ice cream is mostly tiny ice crystals, fat, and trapped air. Add too much milk and the crystals melt and thin out into a glass of cold milk. Three to one keeps enough ice crystals to stay thick while the blender whips in air, which is why a proper shake is lighter and fluffier than the ice cream you started with. Blend too long and the friction of the blades melts it, so short and smooth wins.

Birthday Cupcakes

Makes 12 cupcakes. Double for a party of 10 to 12 so everyone gets two.

Ingredients

- 1 and a half cups cake flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 quarter teaspoon salt
- 1 half cup unsalted butter, room temperature
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 large egg

- 1 large egg white
- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract
- 1 half cup 2 percent milk

Instructions

1. Heat the oven to 350F and line a cupcake pan with paper liners.
2. Whisk the flour, baking powder, and salt together in a small bowl and set it aside.
3. Beat the butter until creamy, about 3 minutes. Add the sugar and beat until creamy, about 4 minutes. These are real times, not guesses, and this step is what makes the crumb.
4. Add the egg and egg white and mix on medium about 1 minute, scraping the bowl. Add the oil and vanilla and beat 1 more minute.
5. On low speed add half the flour, then the milk, then the rest of the flour. Mix only until just combined after each addition.
6. Fill the liners two thirds full. Do not overfill.
7. Bake about 20 minutes, until the tops are set and spring back when you touch them.
8. Cool completely on a rack before frosting. Warm cupcakes melt frosting straight off the top.

Food Science

Beating butter with sugar is not just mixing. The sharp edges of the sugar crystals cut thousands of tiny air pockets into the butter, and the baking powder later fills those pockets with gas so they expand in the oven. That is why the recipe gives you minutes instead of saying until fluffy. Stop early and you get a dense cupcake, because the air pockets were never made.

Vanilla Buttercream

Covers 12 cupcakes. Double for a party of 10 to 12.

Ingredients

- 1 half cup shortening
- 1 half cup butter, room temperature
- 4 cups sifted powdered sugar
- 2 tablespoons milk or cream
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- Pinch of salt

Instructions

1. Beat the shortening and butter together until smooth and creamy.

2. Add the powdered sugar in three additions, beating after each one so it does not fly out of the bowl.
3. Add the vanilla and the salt.
4. Add the milk and beat until the frosting holds a soft peak and spreads cleanly. Add liquid a little at a time until it looks right.
5. To color it, stir in a drop of gel color and mix until there are no streaks. Mixing two colors together is how you get the one you actually want.
6. Spread it on a completely cool cupcake with a small offset spatula, then add sprinkles.

Food Science

Frosting is sugar held together by fat. Butter brings the flavor and shortening brings the structure, because shortening stays firm at room temperature while butter softens. That is why a half and half frosting still holds its shape on a table at a party, and why a frosting made only with butter slumps in a warm kitchen.