



Fresh greens and quinoa provided the makings for the salad course of a Fête en Blanc-themed dinner party that was held outdoors at the home of Paul Yutzy and Melinda Ponce.



Melinda welcomes guests to the white-themed dinner party.

Moving the Party OUTDOORS

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY JORDAN BUSH

SPRING IS UPON US, AND IF YOU'RE ANYTHING LIKE ME, YOU'RE CHOMPING AT THE BIT TO SPEND MORE TIME OUTDOORS. AMONG MY SWEETEST LANCASTER COUNTY SUMMER MEMORIES ARE CASUAL DINNERS WITH FRIENDS GATHERED AROUND A WEATHERED PICNIC TABLE.



Chandeliers gracefully illuminated the outdoor space well into the night.

A few years ago, my fiancée, Jessica, and I weren't in a position to do much cooking or entertaining outdoors. Today, while our home is simple, it's conducive to spending time with friends outdoors. In fact, Jessica and I dined outdoors with guests throughout December. As fun as it was, I'm completely ready for warmer weather and the cold drinks, delicious meals and good times that will be shared.

Keep It Simple

The best thing about outdoor entertaining is that it doesn't have to be complicated, especially if you're short on time to prepare food. Local produce, freshly ground burgers and Good's potato chips are as easy as a Lancaster summer gets.

An even simpler option is to pick up juicy chicken halves from a barbecue fundraiser. Add in prepared coleslaw, potato salad and baked beans from the local grocery store or a specialty shop, and your main course is ready. Stop at a local creamery for ice cream, serve it with fresh fruit from a roadside stand, and you're set for dessert.

If you're short on seating, ask guests to bring a picnic blanket and lawn chairs along. The outdoors presents the perfect space for kids to run around while also being included.

The Allure of Fire

You can't beat the romance of cooking over a fire. If you've ever seen Argentine Chef Francis Mallmann cooking over a fire, you know exactly what I mean. Cooking your meal over a fire from start to finish is always fun. Hot dogs can be easily upgraded to sausages or bratwurst, with peppers and onions sautéed in a cast-iron skillet served with mustard on the side. Chimeneas are another great solution for more contained fires - they can be used for cooking purposes, as well as for warmth and enjoyment. Of course, grilling season is upon us, but we'll wait a few months to have that conversation.

Great Expectations

Moving a party outdoors removes many of the formalities that seem to accompany a traditional dinner party. Establishing good expectations has a lot to do with the success of any gathering, outdoors or otherwise. From indicating what to wear to being aware of the dietary preferences and allergies of your guests, ensures they will know what to expect, and you'll be assured that everyone will have an enjoyable time.

If you want to take your outdoor-entertaining game to the next level, selecting a theme for an upcoming occasion can add an extra element of fun without getting complicated. Themes such as Cinco de Mayo; the Kentucky Derby; Red, White and Blue; or the trendy Fête or Dîner en Blanc (everyone wears white) can live up even the simplest of outdoor parties.

Top to bottom:

Charcoal-grilled salmon, ribs, potatoes and an assortment of vegetables comprised the menu.

A simple arrangement of cheese and pecans created a simple appetizer for guests as they arrived at a dinner party. Other easy options could include olives, jams and fruit.

Put those punchbowls and pitchers to use and fill them with lemonade, a specialty cocktail, a punch like sangria or even water. Dress them up with sliced fruit that can add an extra dimension of flavor.

Paired with a potted flowering plant, old teacups and saucers make for an elegant yet inexpensive centerpiece. They double as great takeaways for guests.

Lighting up a few cigars after dinner is almost a guarantee for relaxed conversation. It's not just a guy thing, either, so be sure to have extras on hand should any of the ladies want to join in.





..... *Lights, Camera ...*

The photographer side of me is always compelled to chase evening light. A magnificent twilight sky creates the perfect ambiance for a stunning yet relaxed occasion. However, once darkness sets in, safety becomes a concern. You can address both the atmosphere and safety aspect of your party by adding strings of lights, paper lanterns, torches, paraffin candles or, for the more ambitious, hanging chandeliers to your outdoor entertaining spaces. Lighting sets the mood and keeps the party going well after the sun sets.

..... *Weather Woes*

In the event of rain, fear not. Unless your powers of prayer transcend mine, ultimately the weather is out of your control. If anything, it will make for a more memorable experience. If you decide to set up a canopy in anticipation of rain, I'd advise you to make sure it's actually waterproof.

Another party crasher is cool evenings, but that can be remedied as well. Keeping a few blankets or throws at the ready is a thoughtful consideration that will keep guests comfortable and less likely to run off early if the temperature drops. I've even noticed that a handful of restaurants in downtown Lancaster have started to make throws available for dining outdoors on cooler evenings. For home-entertaining purposes, invest in some easily washable blankets or throws, as they'll no doubt see plenty of use and potentially be soiled by food, wine and smoke from a fire.

Another option is propane heaters, which add warmth and atmosphere to a gathering. They are a good alternative to times when an open fire might not be permitted, such as during a burn ban. They are not terribly expensive – you can even rent them – and definitely help to expand the outdoor season.

Of course, your menu can help to chase away the chills. Warm apple cider or hot chocolate make for simple treats that hit the spot.

This page:

The Walker family gathers to celebrate a week spent together at Jen and John's home, which is affectionately named Troutbeck in honor of a nearby stream and their English origins.

Tess, Jen and John's golden retriever, inspects the evening's dinner.

Rooted in English heritage, Pimm's cup is the drink of choice for a Walker family gathering. This version is made with ginger ale, lemonade, watermelon, peaches and Pimm's No. 1, a gin-like liqueur. Fruit can be diced in advance and chilled until serving.

For larger groups, catered dishes provide the makings for a quick yet delicious meal, while offering a wide variety of options.

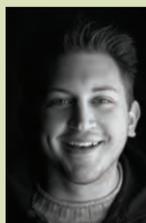
Opposite page, clockwise:

Tess eagerly awaits visitors at the gate.

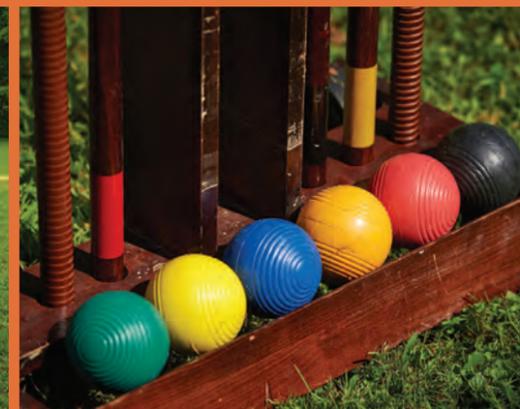
The outdoors provided plenty of "natural" entertainment for younger guests.

Craig is crowned champion of the 20th annual Troutbeck Croquet Tournament, an acclaimed international event.

Jen and John put the final touches on the dinner buffet.



JORDAN BUSH is a commercial photographer. His work has allowed him to discover and document cultures and food across five continents. A graduate of Garden Spot High School and Millersville University, Jordan and his fiancée, Jessica, reside and cook together in Ephrata.



..... *Hit the Road*

If you don't have access to an outdoor-entertaining space, you can always take the party on the road!

Conestoga House and Gardens is a favorite of ours, and it's so sweet that I hesitate to publicly disclose it. When we go there, I always feel like *The Great Gatsby's* Nick Carraway, approaching the meticulously manicured gardens with a picnic basket in tow. As is tradition, on Wednesdays and Thursdays – between June 13 and September 28 – the gardens will be open to the public free of charge. The dance floor offers tables and seating – with a gorgeous view to boot – for up to 32 visitors to enjoy a small meal. Alcohol is permitted, so bring a bottle of wine (and an opener) to share on the gorgeous grounds generously made available by the Steinman family estate. As seating is limited, it is requested that visitors limit table occupancy to 30 minutes and take their own refuse home, so

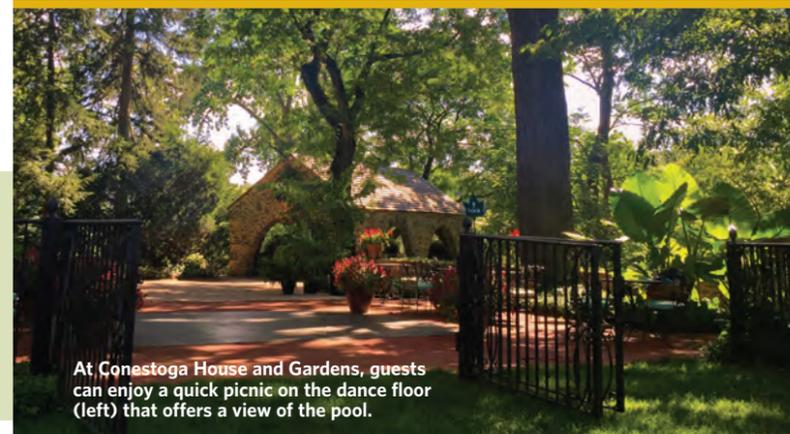
that the grounds remain in the same condition as guests found them. *For details, visit conestogahouse.org.*

Lancaster County Central Park has many outdoor picnic areas with charcoal grills throughout; don't miss the Garden of the Five Senses. *Co.lancaster.pa.us.*

Long's Park also has picnic tables and charcoal grills; go on a Sunday and enjoy live entertainment in the evening, courtesy of the Summer Music Series. *Longspark.org.*

Poole Forge in Narvon is another superb location for a picnic, as it provides gorgeous views of the old lime kiln and the covered bridge that was built in 1859. The park is open year-round, but weddings and other events dot the calendar, so check online schedules at *historicpooleforge.org* before heading out.

No matter where you go, paper towels, trash bags, sunscreen and bug spray are all wise to have on hand.



At *Conestoga House and Gardens*, guests can enjoy a quick picnic on the dance floor (left) that offers a view of the pool.

