It’s Time for a Spring Fling

The sleepy lull of the winter solstice has finally come to an end. Whisk away the cobwebs, pack away the parka and haul out the patio furniture--spring is underway and not a moment too soon! Everywhere you turn, the earth is teeming with life. It is an unabashed season of rebirth; an awakening of the dormant spirit that calls for celebration. Now is the perfect time to welcome the outside world back into your home. Plan an afternoon tea with friends and neighbors who’ve been in hibernation these past few months. An afternoon tea gives you the perfect excuse to 1) get your spring cleaning done 2) use your seldom seen china and silver and 3) pretend you’re a British royal and wear a fashionable hat.

Of course, Americans have favored coffee over tea since 1773, so you’ll want to have both available. Additionally, offer guests finger sandwiches and sweets. The following recipe tops a shortbread-type base with the sweet goodness of strawberry preserves, popcorn for an added whole grain bonus and drizzled chocolate for an elegant touch.

History of the Afternoon Tea

In England, the tradition of serving afternoon tea stems back to the early 1800’s when Anna, the Duchess of Bedford, took a spot of tea and a little nibble toward the latter part of the afternoon to stave off hunger. In those days, lunch was a meager meal and Anna reportedly suffered from a “sinking feeling” hours before dinner was to be served at the end of the day, usually around 8 or 9 o’clock. She invited friends to join her and soon hostesses began copying her afternoon tea event. Delicate crustless finger sandwiches, scones and pastries became associated with the afternoon tea. Tea itself was served with either sugar and milk or lemon. The afternoon tea was a social event and tea and sugar were signs of luxury and privilege.

Sew the Seeds of Friendship

You can get a head start on your garden by asking your guests to bring seeds, seedlings or bulbs to share in order to cultivate a true “friendship garden.” Popcorn plants are a unique offering that'll guarantee good times when they’re harvested. Soak a few paper towels in water and place them in a glass jar. Place a small amount of popcorn kernels in the jar on top of the paper towels. Place the jar where it can get at least 6 hours of sunlight a day and where it can be kept reasonably warm at all times. After kernels sprout, transfer to planting trays filled with potting mixture. Cut trays apart and share!

Strawberry Popcorn Bars

Yield: 24 bars

4 cups popped popcorn
2 cups flour
1/2 cups confectioners’ sugar
1 cup (2 sticks) butter, cut into pieces
1 egg white
1 (10 oz.) jar strawberry preserves
1 cups chocolate chips

• Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease a 9” x 13” pan; set aside.

• Process flour and confectioners’ sugar in food processor several seconds. Add butter and process until dough comes together.

• Press mixture evenly into prepared pan. Lightly brush egg white on top of the mixture. Bake 25 minutes, or until golden.

• Immediately spread preserves evenly over warm crust. Press popcorn into preserves; let cool.

• Melt chocolate chips in small zip lock freezer bag. Heat in microwave 30 seconds, or until melted. Snip corner of bag and drizzle chocolate over cooled popcorn. Cool and cut into bars.

NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION: (Based on 1 serving)

Total Calories 190, Total Fat 10g, Cholesterol 20mg; Sodium 35mg; Carbohydrate 24g; Fiber less than 1g; Sugars 13g; Protein 2g

For more great popcorn recipes, visit www.popcorn.org.