

Table Toppers By Laura Cejka

Table Toppers first interested me because it mixed what I had learned in etiquette class in 5th grade with my creative skills. It stuck out, to me, from all of the other contests because I love planning parties, decorating for them, and planning every last detail about them. This project allowed me to dream up creative parties I could possibly have and plan a fun menu to go along with it.

This is a pretty competitive contest but it's definitely worth it because of the many skills it teaches you. First, it teaches you to manage your time because, in order to do a good job, it's important to start planning your theme and menu at least a month before the contest date. Secondly, it forces you to think creatively. The judges love when you present an idea that is out of the ordinary or when you put a new spin on a traditional party. Thirdly, Table Toppers teaches you presentation techniques and nutrition. You must be able to set up a table correctly with all of the required utensils for your meal and you must balance your meal to contain food from all of the main food groups. Lastly, this contest teaches you how to communicate effectively with a judge because you must tell how you prepared for your project and explain your meal. Communicating your ideas will also help you in interviews both in and out of 4-H.

This contest may seem a little intimidating at first but here are some tips and insider secrets that will make this contest a lot easier for both new and experienced 4-Hers looking to try out this project.

1. When planning your menu try to incorporate foods from all of the major food groups. (It's easy to forget the dairy group, but don't!). Also, try to vary the colors of each food item so, for example, you don't have too much yellow on one plate).

2. Make sure you would actually eat everything on the menu.

3. Insider Secret: Prepare every item on your menu. This way the judge can tell you really cared about this project. (Hint: take a picture of the food you made).

4. Insider Secret: Type out a schedule of when you will start to make the food, up until when you will serve it (include how long each item took to make, etc.). Judges love this!



5. The more detailed, the better! Judges love when you have thought of everything and that it looks like you took your time. This means, try to stay away from paper tablecloths, paper plates, and thin plastic silverware. Try making your tablecloth and using actual silverware. This looks much nicer.

6. Wear an outfit that matches your theme. Remember, you're trying to recreate your party. Dress appropriately for it.

7. Make sure you have a place on the table for everything on your menu and you include the silverware you will be using. (Example: if you're serving rolls for your displayed food item, include the bread basket, bread plate, butter knife and butter).

8. Insider Secret: Mark on your index finger how long an inch is. Every item on the table needs to be an inch away from the item next to it. Also, the plate and utensils need to be an inch away from the edge of the table.

9. Be creative when naming the foods on your menu. For example: for a Rock 'n Roll theme: Jammin' out Cake (cake with a fruity jam layer).

Have fun! This project may seem hard, but if you pick a fun theme, everything else is easy and really exciting to plan.



**Table Toppers is open
for any 4-H'er
Clover Kids through 18!**

