

When Friends pop in

Popcorn is a great snack to have on hand when unexpected guests drop by. Within a few minutes—and for just a few pennies—you can pop up a bowl of fresh, delicious, good-for-you popcorn. Raid the cupboard and you'll find plenty of items to create a popcorn bar. Your guests will marvel at your quick-on-your-feet abilities and applaud your stylish good taste. A popcorn bar inspires creativity. While there's no doubt hot buttered popcorn is pleasing to any palate, popcorn also can be enjoyed when combined with seasonings, spices and other foods like raisins, fruit and cheese providing a healthful, delicious snack.

Planned or impromptu, you can feel good about serving popcorn, a whole grain food that contains energy-producing carbohydrates and provides needed fiber to the diet. Popcorn is naturally low in fat and calories. One cup of air-popped popcorn contains about 31 calories; oil-popped contains about 55 calories per cup; and when lightly buttered, one cup still only has 133 calories. Popcorn has no artificial additives or preservatives, and is sugar-free. And popcorn is ideal for between meal snacking since it satisfies and doesn't spoil an appetite.

Create Your Own Popcorn Bar

What you need:

Freshly popped popcorn to suit the size of your munching bunch.

How To:

Stovetop Popping

To pop popcorn on a stovetop, cover the bottom of a 3- to 4-quart pan with a thin layer of vegetable oil (don't use butter, it will burn). Place 3 kernels of popcorn in the pan, cover with a loose lid that allows steam to escape, and heat. When the kernels pop, pour in enough popcorn to cover the bottom of the pan, one kernel deep, cover the pan and shake to evenly spread the oil. When the popping begins to slow to a few seconds apart, remove the pan from the stovetop. The heated oil will still pop the remaining kernels.

Topping Options:

- Popcorn salt & pepper
- Assorted herbs & spices
- Nuts (pine nuts, peanuts, slivered almonds, pumpkin seeds, etc.)
- Cheese crackers
- Pretzel sticks
- Dried fruit (raisins, cranberries, apricots, etc.)
- Grated cheese
- Chocolate chips
- Cinnamon, brown sugar, nutmeg

Assembly:

Set out a large bowl of popcorn. Put smaller bowls with various popcorn fixings around the big bowl of popcorn. Let each person fill a paper bag or other container with popcorn and top or mix with their desired flavorings. Enjoy!

