In most parts of the U.S., summertime is the perfect time to gather with friends and family and celebrate the glorious offerings of the season. Summer parties are often casual affairs that let you revel in the garden, lounge around the pool, perfect grilling techniques, or polish up badminton skills. Whether you host a potluck dinner, poolside gathering, casual family picnic, or barbecue bash it's important to have plenty of healthful family-friendly fare on hand. Popcorn is the perfect summer snack. It's a whole grain that satisfies hunger without spoiling the appetite and gives you the fuel you need for an afternoon of fun in the sun.

Popcorn is also naturally low in calories—air-popped popcorn contains only 30 calories per cup and when oil-popped, only 55 calories. And three cups of popcorn count as a whole grain serving. You can feel good about eating popcorn.

Add a splash of excitement to your summertime table with these creative popcorn treats.

**Edible Popcorn Party Bowl**

Childhood wishes do come true when you're able to eat the dishes. This edible popcorn party bowl sets the mood for pure, unadulterated fun. No washing necessary!

- 10 cups popped popcorn
- 1 1/3 cups sugar
- 1 cup water
- 1/3 cup light corn syrup
- 1/2 teaspoon vinegar
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 10 drops food color, optional

• Spray the inside of a large, stainless steel bowl with cooking spray and the outside of a 2nd large, stainless steel bowl; set aside. These 2 bowls will be used to form popcorn bowl at end of cooking time. (Note: if one bowl is smaller than the other, spray the outside of the smaller bowl.)

• Spray a 3rd large bowl with cooking spray and place popped popcorn inside; set aside.

• Stir sugar, water, corn syrup, vinegar and salt together in a medium sauce pan. Bring mixture to a boil, cover, and boil for 3 minutes to allow steam to wash down sides of pan.

• Remove lid and attach candy thermometer to pan. Allow mixture to boil, without stirring, until mixture reaches 290°F. Stir in food color, if desired.

• Working quickly, pour syrup over popcorn and toss with a large spoon until popcorn is thoroughly coated. Pour popcorn mixture into first prepared bowl and use a spoon to push mixture evenly up onto sides of bowl. Firmly press second prepared bowl onto popcorn to form popcorn bowl. Allow popcorn bowl to cool completely between stainless steel bowls. To serve, tip popcorn bowl out and place on platter. Fill with popcorn to serve.

_Yield: 1 bowl_

**Cheesy Popcorn**

Cheese popcorn can be downright addicting, and this recipe is no exception. Our version is easier on your waistline substituting cheese with nutritional yeast (found at health food stores) which adds a delicious cheese-like flavor without the calories or fat.

- 2 tablespoons garlic flavored or vegetable oil
- 1/2 cup popcorn kernels
- 1 tablespoon melted butter, optional
- 2 tablespoons nutritional yeast or brewer's yeast
- 1 teaspoon curry powder, optional

• In a large, heavy-bottomed pot (with a lid), place oil and about 3 popcorn kernels. Heat over medium-high heat until a kernel pops. Add remaining popcorn; cover.

• Once corn begins to pop, shake pot constantly over heat. When popping slows, remove pot from heat and transfer popcorn to a serving bowl. Pour butter over popcorn, if desired, and toss. Sprinkle yeast and curry powder, if desired, over popcorn and toss to distribute evenly. Serve immediately or store in an airtight container.

_Yield: 10 cups_

Cheesy Popcorn