



— COOK —
x
THE LONG TABLE

How to Host a Community Feast
Christmas 2023

Amazing things happen when we eat together



Hello,

Thank you so much for your interest in the Long Table and specifically **The Longest Table Christmas 2023** initiative - we hope you have a blast organising your own feast!

Just before you look at the resources we have pulled together to help you make it a success, we would be so grateful if you could share some information with us [here](#). This will help us keep in touch with you, maybe offer some advice but most of all help share your success with the wider community working to bring people together around a table and share good food this Christmas.



Tom
Founder, The Long Table



Hello,

When my brother Ed started COOK with his friend Dale in 1997, the whole concept was making meals that brought people together. While we do a lot of meals for one and two these days, our commitment to using **food as a focal point for communities**, friends and families remains as strong as ever.

I went to see Tom and the team at The Long Table in Stroud earlier this year and was blown away by this pay-as-you-can restaurant. It was such a warm, welcoming and inclusive place ... as well as a solution to so many problems we seem to be facing in Britain: social isolation, lack of nutrition, food waste and a lack of communal spaces. I loved it. We're so proud to be support their community eating campaign this Christmas and I hope, very much, that you'll get involved. Their mantra is bang on: **Amazing things do happen when we eat together.**



Rosie
Co-CEO, COOK

What's in this Pack

You might be looking at this document thinking, *Yikes, that's a lot to read*. Well, we get that. Well, we get that. What you're looking at is **all the tips we've received from community event hosts of Christmases past**, as well as our insights from our experience at The Long Table.

But it can be really straightforward, as simple as hosting a someone at home. Every event counts! Whatever you're planning, **you'll find lots of helpful information**.

This is an evolving guide, a living pack of resources that we'll grow as we add your feedback and ideas. Do let us know how we can make it better next year:

hello@feedingchange2.co.uk

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The way things are, The Long Table is needed more than ever. As things get harder for everyone, the benefits of eating together become even more compelling. The Longest Table Christmas feasts make it possible for many of us to participate in events that build togetherness and hopefulness. It's a great gift to give, so **why not make space for friends old and new at your table this year?**



The Venue

Unless you're having a smaller get-together in your home, you'll need to find a suitable venue.

Size.

How many people are you planning on inviting?

Location.

Is it convenient for everyone to get there? And, if you'll need to organise lifts, is there somewhere for them all to park?

Equipment.

Crockery, cutlery and glasses are a bonus, as you can always bring them along or hire them ... but the main question is does it have enough kitchen equipment to prepare a meal for everyone? It may dictate what you're able to serve. You can download and print off an Equipment List [here](#).

Table and chairs.

These are harder to transport than knives and forks! Will you have enough?

Heating.

This is winter, remember! Check the venue has sufficient heating. If you are feeling brave and hosting a meal outside, do you have access to outside heaters or fire pits that you could borrow?

Decorating.

Step one is making sure it's clean and tidy, and that all the appropriate signs are up for your guests. Create a festive atmosphere. Our top tips are: fairy lights; local flowers or foliage; candles (just make sure they're used safely!).

Downloads

Kitchen Equipment – a handy list to fill in to keep track of everything you'll need in the kitchen.

Place Mats – we've made a template for paper mats with ice-breakers to get the conversation started. Good for spills, too!

Bunting – nothing says 'party' like some bunting...

Christmas Playlist – if you have Spotify, here's a collection of 64 lesser-known but lovely festive tunes.

Building a Team

Unless you're hosting a small event at home, only a superhuman could organise a community feast on their own. Here are the key roles, as we see them...

The Host.

Who will welcome guests to the venue and check they are enjoying themselves? It is often helpful for the guests for someone to give a short speech to welcome everyone, settle them in. Consider who might deliver this.

The Chef.

Depending on how big your get-together is, this could be one person or a whole team. You'll have food to prepare and cook, washing and drying up, and drinks to organise.

The Waiter.

When you're feeding a crowd, it's easiest if guests collect meals themselves from the kitchen. Otherwise, you'll need someone to act as waiter for the meal.

The Supplier.

Who's going to source and buy all the ingredients? They'll need to be on top of any special dietary requirements.

The Manager.

You'll need a go-to-person for handling invitations and acceptances, keeping track of any dietary issues and linking with the Long Table for assistance. This role could also be responsible for any donations that are made during the event.

The Techincal Whizz.

Someone will need to be in charge of the lighting and music, perhaps take photos or videos of guests and even share the event and its success on social media, if appropriate.

The Interior Designer.

Someone to decorate and lay the tables, check the venue isn't too bright or too dark? On the day of the feast, they could help with keeping the venue clean and tidy. Top tip: If you are hosting a large feast and if you can get enough volunteers, a 'clear-down' team can be a wonderful thing to take over from everyone else who has been working - wiping down tables, mopping the floor and putting things away.

The Nona.

It can be lovely to have a Nona (or grandmother figure). They can help people with their coats, take care of bags, make sure drinks are topped up and available, check no one is left on their own. They could even sort taxis or transport for anyone who might need it. They can also oversee what happens to any leftovers, so nothing is wasted.

Download

Speech Template – stuck with your speech? Read our guide.

The Date

The 'official' Longest Table 2023 dates are 9th-17th December ... but of course, **we'd encourage community get-togethers throughout the whole year.**

It matters much less when you host a feast and much more that you host one at all. We'd love to know about them whether they are in December or not! So **let us know your plans** and if there is any way we can support you. We would love to promote your event if we can, and celebrate the success of your Longest Table event. Get in touch by emailing: **hello@feedingchange2.co.uk**

If you can't decide on when to hold it, weekends in December can get busy and weeknights may be limited, so it's worth phoning round some of the people you're planning to invite to get a clearer idea.

So, choose your date and get planning! Once it's set, **[register your event here.](#)**

30% Off for Community Events

If you're planning to get people together in your community, we'd love to help.

To find out more, go to your local COOK shop or visit **cookfood.net/community-kitchen**



Download

Top Tips – some great practice advice from our team and friends to think about. Well worth a read. Let us know if you have any to add!

The Guests

A feast is nothing without guests, so who will you invite? It can be as few as two people at your home right up to many as you can manage! Here are a few things you might like to consider as you build your guest list:

Is this a **special, 'replacement' event** for a group that meet regularly already, or is it a **one-off**? If it will take the place of a previous event, you should already have a list of people to invite.

Think about the **mix of guests** – perhaps neighbours, someone who might be alone at Christmas, people from the local community ... and why not invite a key worker or carer as a way of saying thank you for all they do.

We suggest you send out invitations about **three weeks beforehand**, and then a **follow-up reminder** a week before the event.

Be sure to ask about any **dietary requirements**. It can be quite easy to change recipes to accommodate specific needs ... so long as you don't find out on the day!

Unless the event is already funded, be clear it's a **pay-as-you-can feast**. Some of your guests may want to donate, so have a box or tin for people to put their donations in. Any funds left over would be most gratefully received by us at The Long Table, so we can use this to **feed more people through our work**.

Early next year, we'll add up all the numbers of everyone who ate together at a Longest Table get-together, so be sure to let us know at hello@feedingchange2.co.uk.



Download

Invitation Template – We have a simple suggested invite if you need one.

The Food

The big one: food. Of course it's **up to you** what you serve. At the Long Table we strive to make our menus **seasonal, sourced locally and if possible using surplus** – which is a good rule of thumb for cooking in general, we think.

Whatever you choose, the **best food is cooked with love**. So even if you only have time to prepare a simple soup, it's going to taste great. Here are some things to consider:

Before you start, check you have all the ingredients and kitchen kit. Make a list, check it twice! Don't try and wing it on the day! **Preparation is essential**.

How much advanced preparation can be done, by who and where? If you're planning to cook in advance, **try the recipe first** so that you can better estimate timings and quantities. It will help you serve the feast on time, without running out of food.

All **processes take longer if you are cooking in bulk**, especially cooling times. If you are pre-cooking, refrigerating and then reheating don't forget to leave enough time to cool things to room temperature – a sink of cold water and freezer blocks can help speed things up.

Let **one person take the lead** for all the food-related work. If you're hosting a crowd and cooking from scratch, it's best if that this person has a level 2 food hygiene certificate. If your feast is going to be a regular thing, it's worth talking to the **local environmental officer** to get their advice on food safety. You'll need to **guarantee your meal will be food safe**, preparing in advance only food that can be kept safely.

We've said it before and we'll say it again: **be clear on any dietary requirements** your guests have. Keep a clear, up-to-date list of allergens? A **severe allergy** may affect the menu for everyone.

Decide how to **source the ingredients** and work out the quantities needed. Using local, seasonal and abundant food will keep the costs down.

Think about **condiments and garnishes** – they can really make a meal.

Have a plan for leftovers. You could ask guests to bring Tupperware or take-away boxes with them to enjoy what's left over the next few days or share it with someone.

Download

Food safety – Download this 'Safer Food, Better Business' document from the Food Standards agency. Some great advice on pages 9 and 10.

Menu suggestion – recipes for three courses care of Maisie, and Chris, chefs at The Long Table.

Recipes for Special Diets – Some great recipes that are suitable for guests with special diets, and great for everyone else, too.

The Cost

Hosting a feast at Christmas, especially a big one, costs money. Obviously. How you pay for the food and manage any donations will vary according to the size of the feast, and who is to be involved.

Our community restaurant, The Long Table, is **pay-as-you-can**, and many events like the one you're planning have found this model works really well. It means **no-one will be left out** if they can't afford it. Just be clear with guests that it's pay-as-you-can and have a tin for donations, individual envelopes, or whatever feels suitable. What is important is that it's **anonymous**.

There are two aims for The Longest Table project this year: firstly, **getting more communities eating together**. And secondly, **fundraising to support our work** at The Long Table. But the first is far, far more important to us. If you help support us, that's great, but **our mission is to inspire and facilitate community eating**.

How to Donate

Should there be a surplus after all the costs have been covered, we would be very grateful if you were able to **donate to us** at The Long Table. Either come and see us in person (we'd love to see you!) at The Long Table in **Brimscombe Mill** near Stroud, or you can donate via our website [here](#).



Checklist #1: Planning Ahead

Whether you are planning a feast for six or 106, you'll need to plan it carefully...

Laying the Foundations...

Who's going to organise it?

Double check everyone's clear on their role in making it happen. Arrange a simple way to keep in touch, like WhatsApp.

Lunch or dinner?

Weekdays often don't get booked up as quickly as weekends over Christmas, but many people will be working and unable to make lunch or an early dinner.

Agree who you'll invite.

How can you reach out to people who are isolated in your community? Come up with as good an estimate as you can on numbers.

Find a venue.

For a smaller event, someone's home might work. For bigger gatherings, explore the facilities of the venue (especially the kitchen and toilets!).



Three Weeks to Go...

Kitchen Equipment.

See what's available at the venue, and what people can bring. Then it's time to...

Agree a Menu.

Three courses? Two? Just a main? Consider the various dietary requirements your guests will have. Don't forget drinks. Be realistic! Cooking for a crowd doesn't have to be complicated, but trying to serve everyone at roughly the same time is a real skill.

Alcohol.

If you're serving alcohol not at your home (in England and Wales), you'll need a Temporary Events Notice. Google for the details, but it will cost £21 and take 10 clear working days to get the licence from the local council.

Send Out Invitations.

Make it simple for people to say whether they can make it or not. There's nothing wrong in saying you'll need to know by a certain date! Be sure to ask about food allergies and dietary requirements.

Transport / Access.

Will everyone be able to get to the venue – maybe they don't drive or you'll need wheelchair access. Offer solutions for those who can't.

Checklist #1: Planning Ahead

Two Weeks to Go...

Get Your Paperwork in Order.

For a larger event, have a look into any due diligence need to serve the food safely (don't worry – not as scary as it sounds!). Get that all in place.

Share Your Plan with The Long Table.

Let us know, and we'll support and champion your events as best we can.

Revisit the Venue.

Have another walk though and check exactly what you'll need. Tables, chairs, cutlery, crockery, glasses, and so on. Plan on how to make it warm and welcoming!



One Week to Go...

Follow-up Invitation.

Let everyone know you're excited to see them, and check on anyone you've not heard from. A call trumps an email for this, as emails can easily be missed. See if they have any questions and double check dietary requirements.

Source Ingredients and food.

Can you celebrate seasonal dishes or local famers? Don't forget COOK's 30% discount for community events. Be clear on who's bringing what.

Items for Service.

Do you need more tablecloths, glasses, serving dishes, water jugs, crockery or cutlery?

Venue ambiance.

Think about the lighting, music (and how to play it), heating and table dressing.

Furniture.

Agree on how you'll set out the tables and chairs.

Workwear.

Some outrageous Christmas jumpers can add some festive spirit! Would stickers with everyone's names on be helpful?

What Have We Missed?

Send your thoughts and suggestions to hello@feedingchange2.co.uk

Checklist #2: The Big Day

It's well worth making a **timetable and checklist for the day** of your feast. Below are some of our suggestions of what might what to add, but **have a proper think through** of everything you'll need to make it a success.

- Collect ingredients and food.
- Set up kitchen.
- Have a clear cooking timetable.
- Prepare veg.
- Decorate the venue and lay the tables.
- Warm plates or bowls.
- Put out glasses and jugs or water.
- Heating and lighting set.
- Make sure everyone is very clear on allergens – don't skip this bit!
- Pre-service run through. Who's doing what?
- Final check one hour before guests arrive.
- Collect those unable to get to the venue.
- Get the whole team to taste test the food.
- Welcome people in. A few words is a great way to kick off.



Success!

We love hearing about events that we have helped, even if it's in a small way. So, if you're planning feast register your event [here](#).

It means we can add up all the people that eating at this Longest Table, and helps us measure our impact.

We'd be grateful if you would...

Try to take some **photos** of your feast or some **short videos** – all of course with their permission. Like these [here](#) or [here](#).

See if you can **capture stories** that come out of the event.

There are questions on the [downloadable placemats](#) to encourage engagement, once people have had a chance to think and discuss them, it'd be wonderful if you could **capture some of the answers** to share with us.

Do keep details of **how many people came along**, how many people were served, how many were delivered to people as takeaways etc.

And **please do keep in touch** with us at the Long Table, share with us your successes and help us celebrate both your success and that of others participating in the Longest Table. [**hello@feedingchange2.co.uk**](mailto:hello@feedingchange2.co.uk).



Thank You

We are particularly grateful this year for the support and enthusiasm of COOK whose readiness to help with and promote The Longest Table across their own communities is warmly welcome!

We are grateful too for all the hosts that made last year so successful and look forward to their continued involvement in 2023.

