

# Home cooking

'Dining Diva' hopes to revive the lost art of entertaining.

By Barbara Coots

**Molly Fowler** wants to take the fear out of home entertaining. The culinary expert, who goes by the nickname, the Dining Diva, said that practice is key to gaining confidence about having guests in for dinner.

"The more you do it, the more you want to create that experience again and again."

Fowler, who started her career as a caterer, has outlined a plan for novices in her book, *Menus for Entertaining*. Not merely a cookbook, it shows how to take a themed menu, prepare it artfully, and pull it together before guests arrive.

Each of the menus, which range from "Brunch for Weekend Guests" to "The Husband-Catching Supper," features a foolproof timeline known as the Culinary Countdown and a helpful shopping list arranged by grocery store sections. She tells home entertainers that by following her guidelines, you can be the guest at your own party.

She said that many people have given up entertaining at home because they have gone overboard in the past.

"They make it hard with overly ambitious menus and last-minute preparation in the kitchen, instead of sitting at the table enjoying friends," she said.

Others feel that they must reciprocate the style of others. She encourages hosts to polish their own style of entertaining. The formality of china and crystal may be appropriate for some, but a casual style is equally appealing.

"If you do what you like and what you feel comfortable doing, you'll be a much better host or hostess," she said. "It's when you try to perform outside of your comfort zone that you find it harder to relax."

Fowler said anything goes these days when it comes to entertaining. Mismatched dishes and silver paired with porcelain platters can all go on the same table.

"The rules are not as rigid as they used to be. Cooking is a way to express yourself."

The native Texan and graduate of Texas Tech University got her start in the culinary business innocently enough in Colorado.

"When my husband and I married, we loved to have parties. It was fun to have our friends over," she said. "He at one point said, 'We can't continue to do this, it's too expensive!'"

Their next step was to create a catering business.

"We take a very lighthearted approach to cooking and entertaining," she said, adding that they settled on the name La Piggerie Catering.

In 1998, Texas welcomed Fowler back home. Now, not only is she hosting her own television show, *All the Right Ingredients*, from Houston,



but she has also appeared on many other local and cable programs in the Houston and Fort Worth/Dallas areas. She has become a sought-after instructor and speaker across the state and has also sponsored culinary tours in Europe.

In spite of her statewide fame and success, she retains her down-to-earth appeal.

"When reflecting on the most important times in life for me or friends or family, those times have always been around the table — eyeball to eyeball, talking and sharing and spending quality time."

And the gratification?

"Mmmm" is the best sound in the whole world! It's the greatest feeling to feed my friends," she said.

For more information on Fowler and her book, go to [www.thediningdiva.com](http://www.thediningdiva.com)

**Molly Fowler is teaching a cooking class at Central Market in Fort Worth:**

**Creative Appetizers and Cocktails**

Saturday, Aug. 1, from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

The cost is \$55.

Call 817-377-9005 to register

or visit [centralmarket.com](http://centralmarket.com) for more information.

