

More Ahead Living

FOR WOMEN IN THE NEXT CHAPTER

A FREE KIT FROM JUSTINA

The **Dinner Club** *Planning Kit*

Everything you need to host friends, gather a table,
and bring back the magic of a regular dinner together.

WHAT'S INSIDE

- A simple framework for starting your own dinner club
- 12 themed menu ideas — from Argentine Asado to French Bistro
- A printable menu planning worksheet
- Shopping & prep timeline that takes the stress out of hosting
- A guest invitation template you can copy and send today
- 25 conversation starters for warm, real connection
- Table setting tips and a reusable dinner club tracker

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A NOTE FROM JUSTINA

Welcome to the table.

Hi, friend. I'm so glad you're here.

If you're holding this kit, something inside you is asking for more connection. Maybe the kids have moved on and the dinner table has gotten quiet. Maybe you've gone through a season where it felt easier to keep to yourself. Maybe you just remember a time when there were more candles, more laughter, more long evenings around a table — and you'd like that back.

I started our dinner club in midlife because I missed exactly that. We meet roughly every six weeks. Each gathering has a theme. Sometimes the food is fussy and beautiful; more often it's just one good main, one shared salad, and bread someone brought. The constant isn't the menu — it's the rhythm. Knowing it's coming. Knowing the same faces will be around the table again.

This kit is everything I wish I'd had when I started. The framework, the worksheets, the shortcut menus, the little touches that make hosting feel less like a performance and more like a practice. Use what's helpful. Skip what isn't. Make it yours.

And then send the first invitation. The hardest part is just the asking.

*With warmth,
Justina*

THE CONCEPT

What a dinner club really is.

A dinner club is the simplest, oldest form of community: a small group of people who agree to gather around a table on a regular schedule. That's the whole thing.

It is not a cooking competition. It is not a Pinterest performance. It is not a girls-night-out replacement. A dinner club is a *commitment to one another* — that you will set time aside, every six or eight weeks, to be present with the same people for the length of a meal.

What makes it feel like magic in midlife is the regularity. Friendships in this season can drift quietly without anyone meaning for them to. A dinner club gives those relationships a calendar. The same group, the same rhythm, the same expectation: we will be here together again.

WHY IT MATTERS IN MIDLIFE

Reclaims the dinner table. The space that used to fill the house with noise and now sits quiet.

Builds a friendship rhythm. Casual catch-ups fade. Scheduled gatherings hold.

Creates anticipation. Knowing the next one is on the calendar changes how the in-between feels.

Lowers the bar for entertaining. A theme + shared dishes is easier than the dinner party of your imagination.

Honors hospitality as a practice. Not a performance. A returning-to.

THE FRAMEWORK

Choose your format.

Before the first invitation goes out, decide three things. Write them down. Share them with your group. Once these are set, every future gathering becomes easier to plan.

01 Frequency

- Monthly — high-touch
- Every 6 weeks — sustainable
- Quarterly — manageable

Recommended: every 6–8 weeks.

02 Group size

- 4 people — intimate
- 6–8 people — sweet spot
- 10–12 — bigger energy

Recommended: 6 to 8 people.

03 Format

- Host cooks all
- Host + potluck sides
- Rotating host every time

Recommended: rotating host.

FILL IN — YOUR DINNER CLUB FORMAT

How often we'll meet: _____

How many people: _____

Format we'll use: _____

FOR INSPIRATION

12 themed dinner club ideas.

Pick a region, a season, or a feeling. The theme keeps the menu manageable — and gives the evening a story your guests will remember.

01 Argentine Asado

Grilled meats, chimichurri, simple salad, red wine.

02 French Bistro

Coq au vin, baguette, butter lettuce salad, pots de crème.

03 Tuscan Supper

Pasta, antipasti board, simple roast, tiramisu.

04 Spanish Tapas

Many small plates, sangria, paella centerpiece.

05 Greek Mezze Night

Hummus, dolmas, spanakopita, lamb, baklava.

06 Soup & Bread Sunday

Three soups, fresh breads, butter board, simple dessert.

07 Mediterranean Coastal

Branzino, lemon orzo, grilled vegetables, citrus salad.

08 Sunday Roast

Beef or chicken, root vegetables, gravy, trifle.

09 Moroccan Evening

Tagine, couscous, harissa, mint tea, dates.

10 Build-Your-Own Pizza

Dough rounds, sauces, toppings, salads, gelato.

11 Japanese Izakaya

Gyoza, edamame, yakitori, miso soup, mochi.

12 Cozy Comfort Night

One showstopper main, mashed potatoes, biscuits, pie.

WORKSHEET

Plan your menu.

Use this worksheet for every gathering. Print one or fill in digitally. Keep them in a folder and you'll build a personal cookbook of evenings.

Date: _____ **Theme:** _____

Host: _____ **Number of guests:** _____

STARTER / APPETIZER

MAIN COURSE

SIDES

DESSERT

DRINKS

WHO BRINGS WHAT

THE TIMELINE

Shopping & prep, week-of.

Hosting feels stressful when everything happens on the same day. Spread it across the week and you'll be calm by the time guests arrive.

ONE WEEK BEFORE

- Confirm guest list and any dietary notes
- Lock the menu using the planning worksheet
- Make the master shopping list
- Clean the dining room and set out any special pieces

THREE DAYS BEFORE

- Grocery run for shelf-stable and dry goods
- Order any flowers or pickup items
- Make any sauces, dressings, or marinades that hold

ONE DAY BEFORE

- Buy fresh produce, bread, and proteins
- Set the table — plates, glassware, candles, napkins
- Pre-prep what can be done ahead (chop, marinate, bake)
- Tidy the entry, bathroom, and shared spaces

DAY OF

- Cook in the order things are needed (slowest first)
- Light candles 30 minutes before guests arrive
- Pour yourself something. Take a breath.
- Welcome people in like the friend you are.

THE INVITATION

Send the first one today.

The hardest part of starting a dinner club is the asking. Steal this email. Customize the names, the date, and the theme. Send it. The rest of the kit is for after they say yes.

SUBJECT: Dinner club — would you be in?

Hi friends,

I've been thinking lately about how much I miss long evenings around a table. The kind where the candles burn low and nobody's in a hurry to leave. So I'd love to start something with you.

I'm proposing a dinner club. Four to six of us, gathering every six weeks or so, on a rotating host basis. Each gathering has a theme — Argentine Asado, French Bistro, soup and bread night — whatever the host feels like. The host makes the main; the rest of us bring wine and a side.

I'd love to host the first one at our place on **[date]**. Theme: **[theme]**. Plan for around 6:30, dinner at 7. Casual.

Can you make it? And — would you be in for this as a regular thing?

Pull up a chair,
[your name]

FOR THE TABLE

25 conversation starters.

Save these for the lull between the main course and dessert. Pull one out when you want to go past the small talk. None of them are heavy — just an invitation to share something real.

- 1 What was your first home like?
- 2 What's a small thing that made you happy this week?
- 3 What's something you've changed your mind about lately?
- 4 When did you last laugh until your stomach hurt?
- 5 What's a tradition from your family you want to keep alive?
- 6 What's the best meal you've ever eaten — and why?
- 7 Who taught you to cook?
- 8 What does your perfect Sunday look like?
- 9 What's something you used to be afraid of and aren't anymore?
- 10 What were you obsessed with at 22?
- 11 What would your 80-year-old self tell you to do more of?
- 12 If you could bring back one dish from your childhood, what is it?
- 13 What's the most beautiful place you've ever been?
- 14 What's a book that changed how you saw something?
- 15 What's the kindest thing someone's done for you recently?
- 16 What does success look like to you right now?
- 17 What's a regret you've made peace with?
- 18 If you had a free Saturday, no obligations — what would you do?
- 19 What are you proud of right now, even quietly?
- 20 What's a tiny luxury you indulge in?
- 21 What's something you're learning?
- 22 What did your parents get right?
- 23 What's a friendship that has surprised you in the last decade?
- 24 What's the best advice you've ever gotten?
- 25 What's something you're looking forward to?

THE SMALL THINGS

Hosting tips & a beautiful table.

Setting the table well is 70% of the visual story of the evening. None of this requires expensive pieces. Most of it requires only two things: candles, and intention.

HOSTING TIPS

Greet at the door.

Hands free, welcoming face.

Take coats immediately.

It signals: settle in.

Offer a drink in the first 60 seconds.

Always.

Have music on before they arrive.

Low, warm, never loud.

Light candles 20 minutes early.

The smell sets the room.

Don't apologize for the food.

Serve it like you meant it.

Sit down at the table with everyone.

Your job is hosting, not waiting.

Let dessert linger.

Don't rush coffee.

Send leftovers home.

Especially with the friend who needs it most.

Text a thank-you the next morning.

It seals the warmth.

THE TABLE SETTING

Anchor with a runner or tablecloth.

Linen, cotton, or burlap. Cream or natural.

Layer plates by texture, not color.

White on stoneware on a charger.

Cloth napkins always.

Even cheap ones beat paper.

Two candles minimum.

Taper candles + tealights together.

Greens in jars.

Eucalyptus, herbs, branches. Free is best.

Water glasses + wine glasses.

Even if it's just water.

Place card or sprig of rosemary.

A name handwritten = remembered.

Don't crowd the center.

Leave room for serving dishes.

Dim the overhead light.

Candles do the work.

THE KEEPSAKE

Dinner Club Tracker.

A simple log of every gathering. A few years from now, you'll be glad you wrote them down. Print this page once for every dinner — or fill in digitally and save.

DINNER #1 Date: _____ Theme: _____

Who came: _____

Menu highlights: _____

What to remember: _____

DINNER #2 Date: _____ Theme: _____

Who came: _____

Menu highlights: _____

What to remember: _____

DINNER #3 Date: _____ Theme: _____

Who came: _____

Menu highlights: _____

What to remember: _____

A FINAL NOTE

The hardest part is the asking.
Send the first invitation.

You don't need a bigger dining room. You don't need to be a better cook. You don't need a perfect set of dishes. You need four chairs and a date on the calendar. Everything else is just permission you give yourself.

If this kit was helpful, I'd love to keep showing up in your inbox. New stories, new dinner themes, gentle nudges for the next chapter — every Saturday morning.

WHAT'S NEXT

Read more at moreaheadliving.com

Reflections, dinner club stories, and home tips for women in midlife.

With warmth,

Justina

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