

BOUNTIFUL CHARCUTERIE BOARD

Charcuterie boards have become very popular. Photos of beautifully assembled boards can be found all over social media, restaurants, specialty stores, and even grocery store delis.

Charcuterie, pronounced shar-koo-tuh-ree, is the French word for the culinary art of preparing and assembling meat products. Charcuterie meats include salami, ham, confit, dry-cured sausage, pâtés, galantines, and more. The original French charcuterie used pork, but today's charcuterie boards include an assembled assortment of meats, cheeses, fruits, veggies, bread and/or crackers, pickles, nuts, and spreads.

For your board, you can choose any shape and size you want to meet your needs. Usually, they are made of wood, but you can choose a different material if you would like. To make a board for a small gathering, you will want to choose a smaller board than creating a charcuterie board for a large party.

Small dishes, little spoons, and plates are also needed to build a charcuterie board. It is fun to collect unique pieces from rummage sales or thrift stores to add interest and then use white plates and bowls to focus on the beauty of the foods.

Typically, charcuterie boards contain cured meats, various cheeses, olives and nuts, fruit, herbs, dried fruits, crackers or small slices of bread, and jelly or jam. The expense of building the board will vary based on what you choose to use to assemble it. It is wise to make a budget and a list when shopping for ingredients for your charcuterie board. Also, be sure to check your own cupboards and refrigerator before going shopping because you may already have some of the ingredients.

If you want to make a fancy board with specialty meats and cheeses for a special occasion, you can ask friends and family members to pitch in on the cost and everyone will enjoy it. You can also save money by using less expensive ingredients, such as nice deli sliced ham or summer sausage instead of prosciutto or salami.

Affordable cheeses are brie, blue cheese, Pecorino Romano, or even cream cheese with flavored toppings such as jelly on top. There should be a few different kinds of cheese on the board, served in different shapes and sizes for visual interest.

It is always nice to add fresh herbs to your charcuterie board for visual and aromatic appeal. Fresh rosemary and thyme are usually easy to find at stores in our area and are affordable.

Fruits are also an essential ingredient for a good charcuterie board. While fresh blueberries and raspberries may be expensive or more difficult to find this time of year, they are an excellent choice.

Marinated olives, artichoke hearts, and sweet peppers should be added to the charcuterie board in a small bowl. These can also vary in taste and cost, so choose what fits your lifestyle.

Nuts, jams, and dried fruit are usually added to the board last and work well to fill in empty spaces to create the most visually appealing board. Adding a honeycomb or a bowl of honey with

a dipper or little bowls of jams and jellies adds a sweet touch to your board. You can select any nuts you like. Flavored or salted almonds are an excellent choice. However, the possibilities are endless, and feel free to choose the nuts that fit your budget and tastes.

I also like to use several different crackers on my charcuterie boards. Different shapes, colors, textures, and flavors all add to the appearance and taste of the boards. Carefully stacking and arranging crackers also add to the visual appeal.

Charcuterie boards may look intimidating, but they offer lots of opportunities for customization to meet your tastes, style, and budget. If you build it step-by-step, you will be amazed at how simple it is to create a beautiful charcuterie board!

(Sources: <https://food52.com>; <https://www.harryanddavid.com>; <https://iamafoodblog.com>)