

# asian inspiration

A taste of the Orient for a perfectly Zen birthday or a rehearsal dinner of good fortune.

## asian menu:

egg rolls with sweet and sour sauce\*  
 beef saté skewers with spicy peanut dipping sauce  
 stir-fried ginger-pineapple chicken  
 jasmine rice with scallions  
 garlic snow peas and almonds  
 mango, coconut, or green tea sorbet\*\*  
 chocolate-dipped fortune cookies

\* Buy egg rolls from your favorite Chinese restaurant or from the freezer sections of larger grocery and club stores. Cut each egg roll in half diagonally and serve with store-bought sweet and sour sauce. Allow 1 egg roll and 1 to 2 ounces of sweet and sour sauce per guest. Serve an all-vegetable egg roll along with the jasmine rice and snow peas for your vegetarian guests.

\*\* Serve your favorite sorbet with this menu, allowing 1/2 cup per guest.

## decorating ideas:

**colors.** Jade green, mandarin orange, lacquered red, jet black, and teak.

**invitations.** Choose a variety of patterned origami paper or Japanese book-binding paper. Use a solid color that coordinates with the patterned papers for the invitation and attach with a rustic twig or a cloisonné pin from an Asian import store. Create matching menus using the same format.

**table linens.** Use raw silk remnants, rich jacquards, or bamboo runners down long wooden tables, or cover folding tables with neutral base colors like chocolate brown or black.

**decorations.** Fill round or square glass vases with smooth black river stones, water, and floating candles. Accent a piece of driftwood or tree branch with silk or satin flowers attached with floral wire. Place bonsai trees at regular intervals along the table. Use any rectangular serving pieces with Zen-inspired shapes. Plant easy-to-grow winter grasses in small individual boxes (or one long, thin box) and place in the center of the table or along the

buffet. Hang several brightly colored lanterns from the ceiling with silk butterflies for accents. Choose several delicate orchids instead of elaborate floral arrangements.

**place cards and favors.** Pre-plate the first course and use rice hats as a fun plate-topper and name-card holder combined, or make original origami pieces for each guest. Write names on small pieces of paper and slip them part-way into a fortune cookie so that the name can still be read. Buy sets of take-out style chopsticks from a local Chinese restaurant and write the guests' names on the paper holders. Or buy beautiful, enamel-coated chopsticks and ceramic or wooden chopstick rests that can double as party favors. Prop name cards in front of miniature Buddhas made of stone or jade. Place 4-inch bamboo plants in clean baby food jars or small vases. Set name cards in between the stalks, and let the guests take home their bamboo for good luck.

**entertainment.** Play traditional Kyoto music or use a table-top fountain for a soothing effect.

## menu countdown



### 1 week before:

- Shop for non-perishables.
- Buy beverages.

### 3 days before:

- Make space in refrigerator and freezer.

### 2 days before:

- Shop for perishables.

### 1 day before:

- Set up tables and décor.
- Assemble and marinate beef saté skewers.
- Prepare peanut sauce, omitting the soy sauce and lime juice.
- Chop pineapple and red bell peppers.
- Slice chicken.
- Clean snow peas.
- Toast almonds.

### morning of the party:

- Buy ice.
- Dip fortune cookies in chocolate.

### 1 to 2 hours ahead:

- Grill beef saté skewers.
- Prepare rice.

### just before serving:

- Stir-fry chicken.
- Stir-fry snow peas.
- Stir in the soy sauce and lime juice to the peanut sauce.

