

*<You can't always decorate the demo site to suit your purposes. Stuck in a thoroughly modern home-ec. lab or a school gym, you can sometimes enlist your audience's imagination to get them in the proper spirit to see past surface mundanities. The following introduction achieved excellent results at a Church Dinner in Bristol and a Garden Club Meeting in Rochester.>*

My lords and ladies, pray close your eyes and imagine with me that we have been transported to a distant place and time. It is fall. Michaelmas, the feast of Michael the Archangel, is upon us. This is a time for celebration since, by God's grace and the diligent efforts of our serfs, the harvest is in and should prove sufficient to see us through the winter. Tonight, therefore, we gather in the great hall to enjoy good company and the abundance of the season.

The great hall comes alive. Drafts creep in, whisper in the corners, and sigh through the wall hangings. Banners billow and tapestries seem to breathe. There are rustlings in the rushes which cover the stone floor. Smoke from torches and rush lights mingles with smoke from the great hearth. It loops and climbs, playing hide-and-seek among the vaulted ceiling's oak beams.

We sit on wooden benches at long pine tables which line the hall. There are a number of terriers wandering under the tables, hoping for scraps. A few do more than hope. They dash between the servers legs, dodging kicks and cuffs, while attempting to bring some of the choicer morsels down to their level.

The servants are agile, however, and grip their trays securely. Soon the boards will be piled high with crisp breads and the fruits of the harvest. Moreover, there will be fresh meat in all the courses tonight, for the time has come to slaughter all the cattle, sheep, and swine that we do not need for breeding stock next spring. Now, rather than struggling to feed THEM, their meat will be salted, smoked, or dried to feed US through the harsh winter months ahead.

Tonight, as always, the dishes will be presented first to the high table, where the castle's lord and lady sit with their honored guests, while the resident bard hovers nearby, preparing to entertain between removes. Indeed, the entire feast is a form of entertainment for us, as we marvel at the clever illusion foods and subtleties, choosing what we will from the dishes that make their way down to us.

Conversation and laughter rattle about the hall, gleaming occasionally like daggers and brooches that sometimes catch the light. There is a fine goblet for each couple at high table to share. Coarse wooden and pottery vessels clack in the darker regions of the hall. Below the salt, fine linen napkins give way to rough woven sleeves and the trenchers we eat from are sliced from the bottom of loaves rather than the upper crust.

Now, my lords and ladies, I pray you: open your eyes but keep this picture before them... for it is our wish that you might experience a mediaeval feast as fully as possible!