

UC San Diego

Books and Book Chapters

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Absolutely Free Market

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Peer reviewed

Absolutely Free Market

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NUTRITION INFORMATION

This absolutely free community swap is all about paring and sharing, cleaning and gleaning, with a generous serving of green reuse, a dollop of fun and community building, and a pinch of social justice.

Host a free market and watch trash become treasure as folks rummage through one another's donated books, household items, and other goodies, taking what they want and giving what they don't with absolutely no money involved. As an added bonus, items left over at the end of the day are donated to charity.

NUMBER SERVED

To infinity and beyond or 10 and up. The size of this event varies depending on the size of your staff and the area available. At UC San Diego, the Summertime Swap is open to all who work to keep our library going, from librarians to custodians, students, and more. That's about 300 people, though generally around 100 participate.

COOKING TIME

4–6 hours. Allow 1½ hours for setup, the same for the event, and a couple of hours for cleanup, including taking leftover items to the charity of your choice.

MAIN INGREDIENTS

- People power for setup, staffing the event, and cleanup
- Household donations ranging from clothing and knickknacks to books and buckets
- Publicity materials including announcements and notices
- Room or other area that will accommodate donated items and browsing shoppers
- Tables for various categories of items
- Signage for tables
- Reusable bags for folks to take their goodies home
- Boxes for leftover items
- Van or similar to take leftovers to charity

PREPARATION

Set up your kitchen. Choose a date, time, and place that will allow as many to attend as possible. Be sure to include the custodial staff, student workers, day and evening shifts—all who keep the library up and running. Preheat. Publicize early to give folks time to sift through their stuff, see what brings joy, and gather their donation of household items, books, toys, clothing, and the like that are ready for a new home. Request that all donations be brought to the swap a few hours before the event to allow suf-

ficient time for setup. Emphasize that all are welcome whether they bring something or not, and indicate the kinds and condition of desired donations. A week or so before the swap, send out reminders, and do so again the day before.

COOKING METHOD

Set up the room with book trucks, tables, a place to post notices, and signage for the various categories of objects likely to be donated. A few hours before the fun begins, have folks bring their donations to the appointed place. Donors can distribute their goodies to the indicated areas or drop them off for volunteers to set up. When the moment arrives, throw open the doors and watch the fun begin. Warning: high heat! All are welcome to take what they want. Be prepared for laughter and fun and expressions of gratitude. Following the event, box up leftovers and take them to an agreed-upon charity.

ALLERGY WARNINGS

Keep it clean. Stipulate that donations be clean and in working order. Occasionally in the spirit of giving, folks grab last-minute finds that are in less-than-optimal condition. Sometimes those who need items the most are the most reluctant to participate because they are unable to donate. Encourage all

to come and take what they want or need. There is abundance enough for all even if there is only one ship in a bottle this year.

No judgments. There have been some interesting things brought over the years, and some of the most curious have found grateful homes.

Discourage reserving items before the doors open.

CHEF'S NOTE

At UC San Diego Library, the Summertime Swap is a much-anticipated annual event. Folks would love to do it more often, but it is labor-intensive and would be disruptive at the height of the school year. However, this recipe can be modified for your guests—open it up to the public, offer swaps on a more regular basis. Folks enjoy sharing, and it is wonderful to be able to receive things that one might otherwise have bought and to have an event that is incentive for spring cleaning and paring down. This event brings everyone joy.