

**Title:**

How to Plan a Party That's Enjoyed by All

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**Summary:**

A party doesn't have to be extravagant or expensive to be a success. By making your party plans well ahead of time and preparing in advance, you can entertain in a style that suits you and your guests and be guaranteed a wonderful time.

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**Article Body:**

How to Plan a Party That's Enjoyed by All

When planning a party, remember that the best kind of party is one that allows you time to enjoy the get-together as much as your guests enjoy it. Whether an open house at the office or a holiday gathering of family and friends -- large or small, formal or casual -- with a little planning and consideration, you can entertain with elegance and ease.

### Start by Planning Well in Advance

It is best to begin planning your party about 6 weeks ahead to insure that the last few hours before your guests arrive are calm and stress-free. Prepare your guest list, decide on the party foods and beverages you will be serving and select the recipes you will be preparing. Next make shopping lists of the ingredients, foods and beverages you will need to purchase, and then, calculate what you will need in the way of plates, napkins, etc. Shop for non-perishable items as far ahead as possible and choose a menu that doesn't require a lot of last-minute preparation.

### Appetizers

Serving bite-size party foods that people can 'graze' over is an excellent way to entertain. Your guests can freely mix and mingle while nibbling on easy-to-eat finger foods. To avoid congestion at the buffet table, consider having

servers pass through the room with trays of hors d'oeuvres. You may also facilitate the flow of guests by utilizing accent tables, bookshelves, etc., as small food stations. (Don't forget to protect furniture used for serving with mats or linens.)

To calculate the amount of party food you will want to serve, the rule of thumb is that each guest will consume 5 hors d'oeuvres per hour for the first 2 hours and 3 per hour for each additional hour. So if you are planning a 3-hour party for 10 guests, you will need to provide approximately 130 appetizers. When serving fruit and vegetable trays, figure quantities by allowing two "bites" per item per person per hour. Also, provide 4 small (cocktail) napkins per person per hour (more if finger foods are particularly messy).

You will want to consider a variety of foods when you plan your menu. Choose an assortment of hot and cold appetizers and include vegetarian choices. This way your guests can pick and choose appetizers according to their particular tastes and dietary needs. Fresh fruit and vegetable trays will allow even a dieter to select foods they can enjoy.

In planning the party menu, keep in mind that food safety and serving temperatures are important. No food should remain at room temperature for more than 2 hours. It is best to serve cold appetizers on small trays or plates that can easily be replenished with fresh ones from your refrigerator. Serving hot appetizers is easy if you use fondue pots, chafing dishes, heating trays or slow cookers.

Stick with party foods that are quick and easy to prepare, attractive and undemanding of your time. Include easy, no-cook items such as a variety of firm cheeses, roasted nuts, crackers, breads and chips. You might also want to serve some bakery items such as cookies and brownies for your guests who have a sweet tooth.

Dips and spreads are the mainstays of party food - they are easy to prepare and guaranteed to please. Plan on having at least one spread and two kinds of dip to serve with breads and vegetables and at least one dip to serve with fresh fruit. Make the fruits and vegetables as appetizing and ready-to-eat as possible. Rinse well, trim stems, remove spots and seeds, peel (if necessary), and cut into sticks, rounds or bite-size pieces. Arrange neatly on platters and trays for a colorful and attractive presentation. Provide plastic cocktail skewers (swords) or toothpicks so guests may easily select what they want from the platters. Choose from the lists below to serve with your spreads and dips:

Breads - Assorted crackers, potato chips, tortilla chips, bagel bites, melba

toast, garlic toast, crisp pita bread triangles, rye toast, breadsticks, pretzels, won ton crisps

Fresh Vegetables - Celery sticks, carrot sticks, broccoli, cauliflower, cherry tomatoes, bell pepper strips, cucumber slices, radishes, asparagus spears, zucchini sticks or slices, snow peas

Fresh Fruits - Whole or halved strawberries, sweet cherries, pineapple chunks, orange wedges, kiwi slices, melon balls or slices (cantaloupe, watermelon, honey dew), red and green seedless grapes, mandarin orange segments, papaya wedges

In the event that a party has to be put together at the last minute and time management becomes a big issue, you can always turn to a professional for help. Gourmet appetizer web sites can provide an easy and affordable way to serve impressive chef-quality appetizers while costing considerably less than what a local caterer might charge. Simply select from the large variety of hors d'oeuvres offered, place your order and the freshly prepared frozen appetizers will be shipped to you overnight. All you do is bake and serve.

## Beverages

Always include beverages in planning your party menu. The amount of punch or number of drinks a guest will consume varies and the length of the party must be taken into consideration.

If serving punch, guests will drink approximately three to four 4-ounce servings of punch during a three-hour party, so prepare 1 gallon of punch for every 10 guests.

If serving cocktails or non-alcoholic drinks, plan on each guest consuming 2 drinks per person per hour for the first 2 hours of the party and 1 drink per person per hour after that. A 750-milliliter (standard size) bottle of wine or champagne contains six 4-ounce servings and one 12-ounce beer is considered one serving.

Be certain to have enough ice on hand for serving beverages by stocking at least one-half pound of ice per person and don't forget to have enough glasses for your guests to trade a used one for a clean one at least once during the party.

## Bottom Line for Party Time...

A party doesn't have to be extravagant or expensive to be a success. By making your party plans well ahead of time and preparing in advance, you can entertain

in a style that suits you and your guests and be guaranteed a wonderful time. After all, the whole idea of entertaining is for everyone to enjoy themselves - including the host. When describing a truly successful party, what phrase could be more fitting than one made popular by actress Bette Davis..."[and a] good time was had by all."

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