

How to Host a Party and Handle House Guests

171 Great Party Planning and Guests Hosting Ideas

By Judith Brown

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1. General Party and Guest hosting Ideas

Keep a record of the parties and get-togethers you've given, along with guest lists and menus and what aspects of the event were-or weren't-a success. It will make useful reading next time you plan to entertain.

If you plan a menu of limited courses, everything can be set out buffet style. That way you'll be able to enjoy the meal along with your guests, instead of running back and forth to serve.

So you won't forget anything that needs to be done for your party, do your planning on paper- including a time schedule.

If possible, do most of your party cooking in advance so you won't be stuck in the kitchen away from your guests.

Cooping a party is a great way to entertain, especially if your schedule leaves little time for elaborate preparations. Arrange for everyone to bring something, and you provide the ambiance and the wine.

If you're planning on a house full of guests for a holiday party, don't forget to rent or borrow an extra coat rack so that you won't have to pile coats on a bed.

Preparing for a party is much easier if all your entertainment equipment is stored together in one place.

For easy party serving and cleanup, use 1 big platter to hold the entire main course. Arrange all the food in an attractive manner and serve.

A good substitute for a regular bar can be made by setting out an attractive tray of drinks, glasses, and accessories on a convenient table or counter.

If you're serving separate courses, keep a tray handy between courses and at the end of the meal for clearing the table. It will save you a lot of trips between table and kitchen.

Remember to keep non-alcoholic drinks- juices, soda, etc.-on hand for guests who don't drink alcohol.

Invite your friends to a make-a-pizza party and see how creative you all can be.

An easy and pleasurable way to entertain is to invite friends to your home for a relaxing Sunday brunch.

Before a card party, you can clean plastic cards by placing them in a paper bag with a few tablespoons of flour. Shake the bag, then remove the cards and wipe them off with a damp cloth.

For a special occasion party, send balloon invitations. Inflate the balloons with a balloon pump, and write the invitation on them with a felt-tip marker. Then deflate the balloons, put them in envelopes, and mail to your guests.

If you don't feel confident about timing several courses, serve a casserole in an attractive dish.

Don't try out a new recipe on guests. Prepare it first for family members or close friends.

You'll be sure of the taste and the length of time it takes to prepare.

For an easy party menu, set out different types of salad vegetables and a lot of toppings and let guests create their own salads. Make sure some of the ingredients are interesting or unusual enough to add a festive feel to the meal. Add some bread and wine to make the meal complete.

A creative way of serving vegetables for dips is to line a wicker basket with lettuce and then fill the basket with carrots, mushrooms, cauliflower, celery, and other vegetables.

Large green peppers make ideal cups for dips. Slice off the tops of the peppers, scoop out the seeds, and fill the centers with your favorite dip. A loaf of bread sliced in half horizontally, with each half hollowed out, makes a container for a heavier dip or spread—a thin mixture would seep into the crust and then all over the table.

You can prepare vegetables for a party 1 or 2 days ahead of time. Cut up the vegetables, wrap them in damp paper towels, put them in plastic bags, and refrigerate.

A hollowed-out half melon makes a perfect container for cut fruit. An ice bucket can be used as a serving dish, because its insulation keeps foods appropriately hot or cold.

You can make individual butter servings look different if you put pancake-size dollops of softened butter on a cookie sheet, set the sheet in the refrigerator till the butter hardens, and then cut the butter into various shapes with your cookie cutters.

Don't despair if you don't have as many dessert dishes as you have guests; you can serve most desserts just as easily in wine glasses.

Lay a damp napkin on a serving tray so that tumblers and dishes won't slide off.

For crisp summer napkins, use men's white linen handkerchiefs.

Bagels fresh from the bakery make unusual napkin rings.

Make your buffet convenient for you and your guests by wrapping place settings of silverware in napkins and placing them in a basket.

Dry drinks served before a meal stimulate the appetite more than sweet drinks.

If you're making any kind of fruit juice punch, freeze some of the juice in a large bowl or container, and use it instead of ice cubes. The punch won't be watered down.

A pretty party garnish for punch is peppermint sticks poked through the centers of lemon or orange slices.

Before pouring beer into a glass or mug, make sure the container is spotlessly clean. The slightest trace of soap, lint, or grease will cause bubbles to cling to the side. Next, tilt the container and start pouring beer down the side, then quickly straighten the glass or mug, and pour into the center to minimize the foam. If you prefer a thick head, simply increase the pouring distance between the beer bottle or can and the glass or mug.

Since wine can be damaged by vibrations, store it away from a staircase or machinery.

Wine that must be opened with a corkscrew should be stored on its side. This keeps moisture in the cork and makes opening the bottle easier.

If you don't have the space in your refrigerator to keep soft drinks and beer cold during a party, fill your bathtub with ice and store drinks there.

Ice will last longer for a party if you first freeze an inch of water in the bottom of the ice bucket.

When you're storing wine for any length of time, keep it in a dark place.

When you buy ice for a party, keep it from melting by placing the bag of ice on dry ice.

If you have leftover tea or coffee from a party, freeze them in ice cube trays. Use the cubes to chill iced tea or coffee without diluting the flavor.

An empty wine bottle may be attractive enough to save, but you won't want it if there's a cork stuck inside. If you can't fish out the cork pour ammonia in the bottle and put it where there's plenty of air circulation. The ammonia will make the cork disintegrate in less than a week.

If you want to give your entire house a refreshing scent-perhaps before a party-sprinkle cinnamon on a sheet of aluminum foil, put it in a hot oven, and leave the oven door open.

You can also make your house smell good by placing a solid room deodorizer beside an air- return vent of a forced-air heating system. The air will re-circulate and carry the fresh smell to every room.

You can make a room smell pleasant by dabbing perfume on the cool bulb of a lamp. As the bulb heats, the scent will permeate the air.

Lighting a group of birthday candles with a short match can result in burned fingertips. A better idea is to use a lighted strand of uncooked spaghetti. The same trick works for lighting a candle in a long, deep container.

If a candle is too large for a candleholder, shave off some of the excess wax and then hold the candle bottom over a lighted match for a few seconds. When the wax softens, squeeze the candle into the holder. But make sure that the candle is not so much too big for the candleholder that it will make it too heavy and liable to fall.

To make candles burn slowly and evenly, with virtually no dripping, put them in your refrigerator for several hours before your guests arrive.

When a large decorative candle burns down in the middle and becomes hard to light, don't discard it. Instead, drop a small votive candle into the cavity to make the candle as good as new again. You can snuff out a candle flame with kitchen scissors.

Because not everyone operates on the same morning schedule, let house guests know where to find everything they need to make their own breakfasts.

Guests sometimes feel more comfortable if they don't feel that you're doing all the work. One way to let them share is to write down some simple chores on slips of paper in a basket, and let your guests choose one at random. Some chores the guests can help with are emptying the trash, locking windows, cleaning up after breakfast.

Hand towels for your guests can be rolled up and put in a pretty basket in the bathroom.

Your guests will always remember your parties if you send them picture postcards of themselves. As each person enters the party, snap a photo.

When the pictures are developed address the photo, put a stamp on it, and mail. But only send flattering photographs.

If you're having guests) supply the guestroom with books and magazines, an extra robe) and a tray to keep all personal things in one place.

A nice way to thank your host and hostess for time spent as their house guest is to send pictures of your time together pasted into a scrapbook.

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2. Holidays Ideas

Make your fresh tree last longer by cutting the trunk by 1 inch on the diagonal and standing it in a water base; replenish the water daily.

If you're going to plant a "Jiving Christmas tree" on your property) do it before the ground hardens. Dig a hole big enough to accommodate the burlap-covered roots of the tree) then cover the surface of surrounding ground with a thick layer of mulch. The tree

should be well established by the first snowfall) and it will look spectacular when it is decorated with lights.

Gingerbread men are not just for eating. They make attractive ornaments on the Christmas tree or strung across a room. Before you bake them, punch holes in the head with a straw so that you will be able to thread yarn through them for hanging.

To keep small children or pets from toppling the Christmas tree, place the tree in a playpen "fence." Divided egg cartons make safe storage containers for small Christmas ornaments.

When it's time to put away the Christmas ornaments) buy an extra box of hooks and pack them away too. Next year you'll have extra hooks for the new ornaments.

Postage stamps stuck together? Put them in the freezer for a while. They'll usually come apart with no damage to the glue.

If you're sentimental about greeting cards you've received and want to preserve them, coat them lightly with hair spray to prevent the colors from fading.

Instead of commercial cards, send personalized season's greetings on notepaper trimmed in red or green. Decorate the envelope with seals or stickers.

Make up next year's holiday card list from the return addresses on the envelopes of this year's cards.

Display your Christmas cards by stringing them up against a staircase banister or pasting them around a large wall mirror as a decorative border.

Dress up and decorate wooden clothespins to resemble storybook characters, and use them as Christmas tree ornaments or gift-package decorations.

Encourage neighborliness by planning a caroling party; make it an annual event.

For a festive holiday get-together, have a Christmas cookie exchange. Invite neighbors and friends and ask them to bring some of the favorite cookies.

Holiday shopping won't seem a hassle if you can schedule your shopping excursions at off hours: right after the stores open, in mid-afternoon (2:30-4:30 P.M.), or late enough in the evening to avoid the after-work crowd. Try to avoid the crowds on weekends and lunch hours.

Save assorted cartons and boxes throughout the year, and assemble them into a holiday castle.

Spray paint with gold or silver, and sprinkle with red and green glitter.

Odd-shaped cartons and boxes that you've saved over the year also give you useful resources for odd-shaped gifts that are difficult to pack.

Team shopping with a friend who has similar needs and interests can save time and money.

You'll give each other helpful advice on making the right purchases.

If you're short on time and patience, ask your favorite department store if they have a shopping service. You tell them what you want in any given price range, and they'll shop, gift-wrap, and deliver for you. Sometimes this service is free; other stores charge a service fee.

If you procrastinate and need a few last-minute gifts, investigate smaller stores that specialize in hardware, health food, lingerie, etc., for some suitable items.

Consolidate your gift shopping by buying as many as possible of your gifts in one department of one store.

Don't start on your shopping trip without an organized list of who you're buying for along with their special interests, their color preferences, and their sizes.

Before the Christmas season begins, start a file of gift ideas clipped from mail order catalogs and newspaper ads to spur your thinking once you begin to shop.

If you're taking a child shopping for his or her own gifts for family or friends, limit the outing to the child's shopping only-don't try to combine it with yours. Help the child make a list of possible gifts and how much he or she budgets for each one. Make the occasion special by finishing up with a movie or some other treat. If you have several children, make the occasion even more special for each one by taking them separately.

Hire a neighborhood teenager with a driver's license to hand deliver your gift packages.

To keep track of children when you're shopping in crowded holiday stores, dress the kids in bright colors; a brightly colored hat is especially visible. Have small children wear nametags, Or hire a sitter to take care of the kids while you shop alone.

Take a photo of your children opening the gift package from a relative or grandparent, then send the picture to the giver along with the child's thank-you note.

If you're the sole guardian of the keys to the family car, the trunk of the car is a great hiding place to stash gifts until Christmas morning.

Fill an old mason jar with pretty pebbles and sea shells collected at the beach, tie on a ribbon, and give as a decorative doorstop.

To lighten your luggage at holiday time, have the store mail your gifts directly to the recipients.

Get into the holiday mood by making festive barrettes. Glue decorative strands of ribbon to the top side of the barrette. At the ends of the ribbons tie small pine cones, feathers, or jingle bells.

So that your children have a chance to buy Christmas presents without your finding out what they're choosing for you, have a neighbor or a friend take them shopping. You can return the favor with your neighbor's children.

Use recycled lace and pretty fabrics to make beautiful Christmas stockings. Keep a few "general interest" items in stock to avoid embarrassment when you've forgotten to buy a gift. Holiday cookies, preserves, or other food gifts are acceptable to most people-and you can use them yourself if you don't give them away.

If you can face the stores after the holiday, you'll find Christmas cards, ornaments, gift items, wrapping paper and ribbons, etc., on sale at greatly reduced prices. Stock up for next year- you'll save money now and time and energy when the Christmas shopping season rolls around again.

So that one person doesn't do all the work, invite family and friends over to help cook the holiday meal.

It's easy to make a heart-shaped cake to serve on Valentine's Day. Just bake a round cake and a square one. Face the square one toward you, point forward like a playing card diamond. Slice the round cake in half and position the 2 halves against the diamond's uppermost sides. Frost and serve.

Wrap a baby gift in a receiving blanket or diaper.

A hurricane lamp filled with colored glass ornaments makes a lovely centerpiece for your holiday table.

Natural dyes can be used to color Easter eggs. You'll have green eggs if you boil them with grass; red if they're boiled with beets; and yellow if onion skins are in the pot.

On Mother's Day, use an oven mitt as the wrapping for a small gift, especially if the practical mitt hides something exotic-like a piece of jewelry or a bottle of perfume.

Don't throw out the pumpkin seeds when you're through carving a Halloween pumpkin. Salt the seeds and dry them in the oven for a tasty and nutritious snack.

If you're proud of your carved Halloween pumpkins and want to keep them firm longer, spray them inside and outside with an antiseptic, repeating as necessary. The antiseptic destroys the bacteria that normally attack pumpkins and make them go soft.

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3. Gifts and Gift Wrapping

You'll always have little gifts on hand if you remember to buy doubles of things you need yourself. Such items as jellies and preserves, correspondence notes, and toiletries make suitable gifts. You can also take advantage of sale items and specials that look like suitable standby gifts.

Store these potential gift items in a particular spot.

This is also a great way to stock up on holiday stocking stuffers for the children.

Fill a small basket with spices as a gift for someone who loves to cook.

A straw basket filled with special soaps, a nail brush and good face cloths makes a wonderful house gift.

Make a loaf of bread and wrap it up along with a jar of homemade preserves as a delicious and practical gift.

Need an unusual gift for a friend? Paint a pillow with nontoxic acrylic paints and personalize it with your friend's name, dates or place names important to that person, or a special design or message.

Instead of buying a box of note cards as a gift, make up a package of the lovely art reproduction postcards you can buy at museums.

When bringing fresh flowers to a friend, put the stems into a balloon with a little water in it; secure with rubber bands. The flowers stay fresh and are easy to carry.

When you make a gift of stationery, include some stamps. This is an especially thoughtful touch if the recipient is someone who can't get around much—a person in a hospital or nursing home, maybe.

Think big when buying baby shower gifts.

Babies are often ready for the 6-month size within a couple of months of birth. Also, every mother needs baby shampoo, soap, washcloths, crib sheets, soft towels, disposable diapers, baby sleepwear. And what about something nice for the mother-to-be, too?

For a friend who hates housework, give a gift certificate for one day's professional cleaning service.

Have a writer on your gift list? He or she will appreciate a supply of legal-size lined yellow pads in a monogrammed leather case. Or even without the case.

For friends who enjoy the beach or have the luxury of their own swimming pool, a set of plush bath towels is a welcome gift.

If you have any artistic talent, put an original ink drawing on the cover and on several inside pages of a notebook, and give it to a friend to use as a diary or personal record-keeper.

For a practical but pretty shower present, buy a laundry basket and attach kitchen gadgets and towels with colored ribbons.

Enlarge the cultural horizons of a friend: give records of music from Latin America, Italy, Germany, or some other country.

Organize your gift-wrapping chores by storing wrapping paper rolls in a narrow wastebasket, along with scissors, tags, Scotch tape, and marking pens of assorted colors.

If you're not sure how much to cut from a large roll of wrapping paper for a particular package, first wrap a string around the package, cut it so there's a slight overlap, and use it as a measuring guide.

To wrap an oversize Christmas gift, why not use a paper Christmas tablecloth? It is easier to handle than several sheets of ordinary wrapping paper.

Pack gifts in practical baskets or decorative tins or containers. Your gift will be doubly useful, and you won't have to buy wrapping paper and ribbon.

If you're mailing cookies, minimize breakage by packing them in fluffy, unflavored popcorn. The recipient can eat both the cookies and the packing.

If it's not too used-looking, smooth out wrapping paper from gifts you've received and use it again. And don't forget that you can iron paper that's not too flimsy.

Wrap gifts in color comic strips or bright magazine covers and artwork, Newspaper and brown paper bags make strong and surprisingly attractive wrappings for packages.

A gift for a teen can be wrapped in a colorful bandanna.

If a paint or wallpaper store will give you old wallpaper sample books, you can use the sample pages as gift-wrapping paper-elegance at no cost at all.

Dress up a plainly wrapped package by spelling out the recipient's name or a greeting from letters cut from newspaper or magazine headlines.

Check out the accessories in a fabric goods store for unusual trims to decorate your package.

Old maps and pieces of sheet music make fine wrapping paper.

To press a wrinkled ribbon flat, pull it through a hot curling iron.

Instead of tying a package with ribbon, glue on dried leaves and flowers to decorate. Or simply paint a ribbon on your gift-wrapped box.

Make small squares of wrapping paper double as gift tags. Fold a piece in half, punch a hole in the corner, and write your message inside.

Blow up a balloon, paint the recipient's name on it, and tie it to your gift.

To protect a gift bow on a package from being crushed in transit, keep a plastic berry box taped over it until you arrive at your destination.

Paint the recipient's name and the year on a shiny Christmas bauble and tie it to your gift. Your friend can hang the bauble on his or her tree as an annual reminder of you.

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2. Cleaning and Washing Floors

A mopped floor occasionally dries with a luster-dulling film; if you mop it again with water containing a cup or so of white vinegar the floor will glisten.

A pencil eraser or fine, dry steel wool is often effective in removing scuff marks left by shoe heels on resilient flooring. Lift crayon marks by rubbing them with toothpaste or silver polish on a damp rag.

Instead of using commercial preparations, you can "wax" a floor by washing it with warm water to which you have added 2 tablespoons of furniture polish and 1/2 cup of vinegar.

When cleaning an asphalt tile floor with water, use a well-wrung cloth or sponge; excess water can seep into the seams and loosen the adhesives that hold the flooring.

Rather than wax floors on your hands and knees, stand and use a long-handled paint roller. A roller not only speeds up the waxing process, it makes it easy to reach under a radiator or built-in

furniture.

To clean up raw egg dropped on a floor, sprinkle it with salt, let it sit for 15 to 20 minutes, and then sweep it up with a broom.

Instead of using a rag to apply paste wax to floors, get a better grip and protect your skin with a glove-type potholder or workman's glove slipped over your hand. Such gloves have the added advantage of being sturdy and easy to clean.

When washing highly waxed floors between waxing, use a solution of 1 cup of fabric softener in 1/2 pail of water to prevent dulling the shine.

A few drops of vinegar in the water used to clean the kitchen floor will help remove particles of cooking grease that have settled from the air.

For a fast shine between floor waxing, put a piece of waxed paper under your mop and slide it around your floor.

After you've waxed a floor, wrap a bath towel around each foot and shuffle around the room to polish the floor in a flash.

When it's time for a new coat of wax on a linoleum or tile floor, remove the old wax by mopping with a solution of 3 parts of water to 1 part of rubbing alcohol.

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3. Cleaning Walls and Wall Coverings

There's no need to purchase expensive wall cleaner. You can make your own economical cleaner by mixing into a gallon of warm water 1/4 cup of washing soda, 1/4 cup of white vinegar, and 1/2 cup of ammonia.

Lift crayon marks off a painted wall by rubbing them carefully with a cloth or sponge dampened with mineral spirits or lighter fluid. Remove any shine by sponging lightly with hot water.

To remove crayon marks on wallpaper, rub carefully with a dry soap-filled, fine grade steel-wool pad. Or use a wad of white paper toweling moistened with dry-cleaning solvent and delicately sponge the surface. Carefully blot and lift in small areas to prevent the solvent from spreading and discoloring the paper.

It's best to wash walls from the bottom up; otherwise, water trickling over the dry, unwashed areas creates hard-to-remove streaks.

You can make washing walls less of a wet, messy task by decreasing the amount of water and using an egg beater to make thick suds.

Remove ordinary soil marks from wallpaper by rubbing them gently with an art gum eraser.

It's easy to remove transparent tape from a wall without marring the paint or wallpaper if you press the tape-through a protective cloth-with a warm iron to soften and loosen the tape's adhesive backing.

To prevent water from running down your arm when washing walls, fashion a bracelet from a sponge or washcloth held in place with a thick rubber band.

For cleaning rough-textured walls, old nylon stockings or socks are better than sponges or cloths because they won't tear and leave difficult-to-remove bits and pieces on the surface.

You can sponge washable wall coverings and some vinyl's with a mild detergent. To find out how much elbow grease your paper can take, first work on a scrap.

Lift grease stains from washable wallpaper with a paste made of cornstarch and water. Alternatively, rub dry borax over stains.

To remove grease stains from a grass-cloth wall or ceiling covering apply an aerosol dry cleaner. Follow instructions carefully.

To remove a grease spot from non-washable wallpaper, place a blotter over the spot and press it with a moderately hot iron. The blotter will soak up the grease. Repeat as required.

You can also use talcum powder to remove a grease spot on non-washable wallpaper. Dust on the talc with a powder-puff, leave it for an hour and then brush it off. Repeat, if necessary.

Clean non-washable wallpaper with rye bread.

Make a fist-sized wad of bread and rub it across discolorations and dirt.

To remove white water marks from wood wall paneling, rub mayonnaise into them. Wipe off the mayonnaise 12 hours later. The marks will have vanished.

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