

Quick Tip Series: Successful Entertaining

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The Guest List

- **Mix this up**, singles and marrieds, age mix. We learn more from those beyond our generation. Include both business associates, friends, new acquaintances and family.
- **Involve your guests**. Give them a chance to bring something, be specific it makes it easier. For example, ask everyone to bring a favorite wine, or bubbly, or perhaps at the holidays they can bring an ornament. Potluck is always an option. (Keep up with this or you'll wind up with too many chip and dip and no dessert or salad!)
- **What to bring**. Do a game party and have everyone bring a favorite game, or a charitable donation and have everyone bring something for Goodwill. Everyone is more comfortable bringing something.
- **Be clear in expectations**. Make the invitation clear with date, day, time, dress (give examples, this seems the biggest issue), occasion, what to bring, what to expect (a good time by all certainly), directions, parking and such. Don't leave room for questions it will streamline the RSVP process and reason to attend.

The Menu and Presentation

- **Bite-size makes a difference**. This is important, all of us have been stuck at a buffet with a plate in hand and food requiring a knife and fork, and no tables to set the plate down and carve. There is nothing more uncomfortable than popping an oversize bite in your mouth and being immobilized while attempting to reduce its size before swallowing.
- **Finger food makes it easier**. Pasta with sauce is clearly not finger food. Make it easy on guests and have mini-kebobs, skewered or tooth picked items, stuffed mushroom caps (button mushrooms, not jumbo!) salmon on toast points and such. Food that doesn't require utensils is fun and simple.
- **Color is delicious**. Make the food colorful, if not inherently so then with garnish. Presentation matters and people eat color. All brown, even if a toasty color is boring, add green, red, and yellow with peppers, parsley (tried but true), herbs and spices, sliced veggies and fruits. If it looks appealing it will get eaten.
- **Tell them what it is**. Take the time to put signage on the food. This counts, not only does it remove the mystery but potential allergic reactions by unsuspecting party goers that don't know what is inside. This can be done tastefully with place cards or even small ceramic markers.

The Decorations and Mood

- **Start at the front door**. Make sure that everyone knows you are having a party from your front door to the back door. Whether it is signage, balloons, props, a special entry, allow guests to feel the mood at the beginning. It adds excitement and anticipation and gives them something to talk about.
- **Leave room for guests**. It is easy to overdo and forget that you do need room for guests, not just party props and decorations. You also need to make room for glasses to be set down,

plates to be parked and such. Put out coasters as a hint, and be sure that you have places they can leave empty plates.

- **Be creative but consistent.** Sometimes it is tempting to throw in everything but the kitchen sink, don't. Consider using no more than three colors in any scheme and select one or two shapes to focus on. A lot can be achieved with gold, silver and a third color each time, and stars and diamonds are easy shapes. Repetition gives continuity and reinforces a theme. This works for holidays, Oscar night, a gambling affair, and more.
- **Give something away.** Leave a basket by the front door with a take away gift for guests. This is your thank you to them being there. It can be as decadent as a mini-box of Godiva truffles or as silly as a bag of sand for a summer gathering with beach toys. It needs to relate to the event and be personal.
- **Real vs. Plastic.** For ease of party without full staff, go plastic on plates, but never on glasses. A load or two of glassware at the end of the night is no big deal when plates and cutlery can be tossed. Others will disagree and insist on those glass plates so popular, too often they look scratched up, overused and dull. Go with real china and make it fun with a party set, if you don't want plastic.
- **Size counts.** Please don't be stingy and use those silly 6" plates for food, give your guests a real 10" plate and avoid the need for standing around the buffet table grazing because they can't get enough on a plate to enjoy it. Use a separate plate for dessert items with fresh flatware.

The Art of Hosting

- **Get involved.** If you don't have a good time, then neither will your guests. You will need to ensure that all of your preparations are complete and you have time to mix and mingle. They are coming to see you, not watch you work.
- **Get outside help for food.** You can hire a caterer, go pot luck if on a tight budget, or split the difference and do it with help from Whole Foods and Kroger or any other gourmet prepared food source. Doing it all yourself is admirable, but not often feasible in time and effort.
- **Get outside help on service.** Hire a bartender even if just to pour wine for the night. You can go pro or ask a neighborhood college student (of age of course). You may want to consider serving help too, or ask a couple of good friends to help you keep up with the food and empty plates.

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