

Time to Plan for Your Holiday Party



Hosting a holiday event takes its toll on our time and houses. Did you promise yourself last year that you were going to be better organized, and be party ready before the doorbell rings? Get ahead of the rush with some easy advanced planning and home prep.

Start by setting some doable goals. Make a list. My mother always made lists and she was the most organized and well prepared person I've ever met, so I know they do work.

Sit down with a cup of coffee or glass of wine and list of all the things that were problematic last holiday season. Don't worry about how complicated or simple the task, jot it down. Just the act of seeing them listed can be inspirational.

I'm sure you have more tasks on your list than time to accomplish them. Prioritize and delegate. This is not a solo mission, you need to enlist your whole family. The least stressful you can make the event the more everyone will enjoy themselves.

Check your calendar and see how many weeks you before the event. It's easier if you prepare one week at a time. Here's some tips on how to organize your tasks.

1. Think about the kind of event you want to host.

A cocktail party for 25 friends, a sit-down dinner for 8 or an open house for dozens. Is the event casual or formal? Each event requires different supplies, seating arrangements and menu.

2. Take inventory. Start gathering your entertaining supplies and dishes. Do you have enough dishes, glasses, serving platters, utensils, bar ware . . . Check table linens to make sure they are party ready. You don't want to be ironing table cloths and napkins the day of the party. Replace stained and worn hot pads and dish towels. Make a list of things you need to fill in the gaps. Shop for them now while store inventories are abundant and make rental arrangements if necessary.

3. Deep clean your kitchen and any rooms that will be accessed during the event. You don't want to look up during the party and see cobwebs draping from the crystal chandelier or layers of dust on display items. Replace anything that looks faded, worn or well-loved. This includes stained rugs, flattened or soiled throw pillows and dusty drapes. It's better to have a limited number of decorating accessories than ones that have seen better days. Don't forget to clean your windows and porch lights as well as the glass in picture frames.

4. Who's doing the cooking? If you are having the event catered, book them now. If you're the chef make sure you have all the pots, pans and cooking tools that you need to prepare each item on the list. Your menu should include dishes that can be prepared ahead of time. Prep ingredients to eliminate anything being mixed, blended or whipped together

at the last minute. You never want to be cooking while guests are arriving or leave dirty prep dishes in the kitchen sink. If you must assemble something during the event organize dishes and serving pieces ahead of time and plan to display them artfully on the kitchen counter.

5. Organize and clean your pantry, cabinets, refrigerator and bar area. Knowing what you have and plenty of space to store extra purchases is priceless. This is the perfect time to check expiration dates, pitch stale dry goods and consolidate duplicates. Find and clean the food coolers for storing ice and menu items. Don't forget clean up. Have plenty of clean sponges, paper towels, trash bags and storage containers ready for party cleanup. Time shopping trips. Buy as much as possible a week or more ahead of time. Leave only fresh ingredient shopping for the day before the event.

6. The day of the event organize any last-minute tasks and who's responsible. Take as much off your plate as possible. Treat yourself and your family to dinner out the night before the event. Give them their last-minute assignments and get their commitment to help. Don't forget to have the most reliable person buy plenty of ice.

Relax, you got this!