

PARTY CHECKLIST

ONE MONTH BEFORE PARTY

- Decide on theme.
- Decide on location.
- Reserve location, if necessary.
- Make a guest list.
- Mail or email invitations.
- Choose the menu; organize recipes for easy reference.
- Create a timeline for preparing your chosen recipes.
- Read through recipes and make lists of the ingredients you need to buy.
- Try out any new recipes you want to troubleshoot.
- Plan decorations.
- Take inventory of cookware and serving dishes, tables and chairs.
- Arrange to borrow, rent, or buy serving pieces and other items that you might need, such as chairs, tables, platters, glasses, flatware, or table linens.
- Order flowers now.

TWO WEEKS BEFORE PARTY

- If you're throwing a potluck, or if friends have offered to bring something, let guests know what to make.
- Set the table, as a trial run, to make sure you have all the dishes and serving utensils you'll need.
- Shop for any decorations you may need.
- Purchase wine and liquor.
- Come up with a playlist.

ONE WEEK BEFORE PARTY

- Clean the house thoroughly.
- Call or email guests who have not yet RSVP'd to see if they plan to attend, and also follow up with guests who have offered to bring a dish.
- Do any needed outdoor work like raking leaves or cleaning the glass on your front door.
- Will you need a high chair, crib, or booster seat? Bring them out and clean, or arrange to borrow these items from a friend or the parent.
- If children will be attending, get out games or movies for them. Or ask parents to bring things for the kids to do.
- Make space in the refrigerator or freezer so you'll have room to store groceries.
- Go shopping for food.
- Prepare any items -- pie doughs, soups, and appetizers -- that can be frozen.

THREE DAYS BEFORE PARTY

- Pick up any last minute food items.
- Prep any make ahead items.
- Make a detailed cooking schedule for your remaining dishes.

PARTY CHECKLIST

- Plan ahead for leftovers. Organize containers, bags, and wraps so guests can take home leftovers.
- Decorate.
- Clear out any unnecessary items from public areas.
- Pick up anything you are renting.
- Specify a place for coats.

TWO DAYS BEFORE PARTY

- Wash serving pieces, plates, flatware, and glasses, and polish if necessary.
- If using cloth napkins or tablecloths, iron them.
- Write place cards and create seating arrangement.
- Set the tables and place serving dishes on buffet. Make a sticky note for each, to indicate which dish it will hold.
- Fill salt and pepper shakers and butter dishes.
- Lay a fire in the fireplace, ready to light later.
- Place frozen food, like pie dough, in the refrigerator to defrost overnight.

ONE DAY BEFORE PARTY

- Give your house a once-over.
- Check your bathrooms. Be sure to have extra paper goods and hand towels available.
- Make a staging area for coffee, desserts, and drinks. Stock with flatware, sugar and creamer, cups and saucers, etc.
- Buy and arrange flowers.
- Finish as much of the cooking as you can.
- Make the vegetables and side dishes that require baking, such as casseroles, and cook them right before dinner.
- Begin making yeast doughs for rolls and biscuits (some need to be started the next day).

DAY OF THE PARTY

- Quick clean of floors.
- Clean bathrooms and set out clean guest towels, nice soaps and flowers.
- Assign specific family members or relatives to be in charge of tending the fire, pouring drinks, answering the door, hanging up coats, and watching the children.
- Chill white wine and sparkling wine.
- Place chairs.
- Set up the bar, slice lemons and other garnishes.
- Place flower arrangements.
- Have trash cans and extra garbage bags ready.
- Set aside a space for dirty dishes and glasses.
- Finish any last-minute cooking.
- Bake rolls and biscuits.
- Light candles and adjust lighting.
- Turn on music.
- Display food.

PARTY CHECKLIST

CLEANUP

- Before leaving the table, blow out candles.
- Collect used cloth napkins and place them in the laundry.
- Quickly fill the dishwasher with one load of dinner dishes and glassware. Add soap and run a cycle.
- Fill the sink with hot soapy water and drop in silverware and any items to be hand-washed.
- Put away leftover food in containers, foil packs, or plastic bags.
- Wash items in the sink, then refill with hot water to soak pots and pans.
- Clear and wash kitchen counters.
- Wash serving pieces belonging to guests. Set labeled bags in a mudroom or hall, ready to take home.
- Organize games or other entertainment.
- Finish dishes as time allows, or after guests depart.
- Launder tablecloth and napkins.
- Put away dishes, serving pieces, and glassware.
- Return any borrowed tables, chairs, games, etc.
- Make notes on what worked -- and what didn't -- and keep in your recipe box.
- Write and mail thank-you notes.