

## Party Planning Made Easy

Women's Edition Magazine

The Good Life - November 1997

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Sit back for a moment, close your eyes, and think about what the holiday season means to you. What comes to mind? Is it the smell of cookies baking, watching your children perform in the school program, and sitting down to a full feast spread out on the dining room table? Or are your thoughts geared more towards crowded shopping malls, end-of-year deadlines at the office, and spending a solid week preparing a meal that will be completely devoured in half an hour? Your idea of the holidays is probably more of a combination of these.

It's no wonder we're so busy during the holidays. We have all of our regular day-to-day activities which never seem to end, as well as having to ensure that the holiday festivities are pulled off without a hitch. How in the world is a busy woman supposed to keep on top of all of these activities? Holiday parties certainly add to the season's events, but who has time to plan one?

Actually, planning a party is easy; it's all of the preparation and cleanup that really cuts into your time. Preparing and serving all the food, cleaning the house before and after, and you're supposed to *enjoy* the party too? What is the most fun part of a party? The planning itself, of course! So, why not do the "fun part" yourself, and let other people take care of all of the work for you?

Now that we've decided that planning a holiday party will fit into your schedule, let's start the planning! What type of party would you like to have - a small in-home dinner party for close friends and family, an adults only cocktail party, or a large formal event? Whatever type of party you plan to host, there are services available to simplify the process, and allow you to spend your precious time on more important things!

**Invitations.** When creating your guest list, keep in mind that only about 30% of those invited will be able to attend. This figure may be slightly lower during the busy holiday season. Reputable print shops and specialty stores offer many convenient options for your invitations and can usually complete the entire order within a day or two. A vast selection of paper styles is available. Choose from pre-printed invitations with to/from-type blanks, card stock with imprinted or computerized graphics, or blank card stock. The details of your event may be typeset onto the invitation, or you may choose to hand write the specifics and have them photocopied onto the invitations themselves.

Additional time-and-hassle-saving measures may also be available for an additional fee. For example, mailing labels can be prepared from your list of

addresses. Most shops will also affix a label and stamp to each envelope and mail them for you. Invitations should be sent out early; three to four weeks in advance will cut down the number of guests with prior plans.

**Catering.** Decide what type of food you would like to serve - hors d'oeuvres or a full meal? A good catering service can save time and money creating the entire spread, or just certain parts of it. Plan your menu and contact the caterer or bakery at least two to three weeks before the party. If you plan to prepare any of the meal yourself, food which can be frozen may be prepared up to a week ahead. Food which cannot be frozen should not be made any earlier than the day before the event.

**Rental Supplies.** Why buy and store party items you may never use again? Are you going to want to use the same theme, colors and style for every party you throw, or would you rather be known as a "creative" entertainer? The right rental company can provide most items for your dinner table, such as china, silver and glassware, color-coordinated linens and table skirts to match your event, as well as the table and chairs themselves. Select appropriate centerpieces or candelabra from their vast selection to complete a certain theme or ambiance. Additional decorations such as brass or lattice arches, fountains, or theme backgrounds are also available to rent, if you have the space for them!

Do you have a bar set up for before-and after-dinner drinks? If not, you guessed it - you can rent one! How about adding a unique item, such as a margarita machine? If children are invited, you may want to consider renting a clown, a magician, or a cotton candy machine to keep them occupied. As a convenience measure, most rental companies also offer delivery, set-up and tear-down services for an additional charge.

**Additional Ideas.** Depending on the size of the party and the location, you may want to explore other unique ways to make your event memorable for your guests, and easier on you! Save yourself additional time and hassle by hiring a maid service to assist with preparation and cleanup. How about impressing your guests with valet parking as they arrive? Add additional class to your event by hiring a serving staff and professional bartender.

Why not record the celebration by hiring a professional videographer or photographer? Most companies charge by the hour, and a minimum order or package purchase may be required. Check around for the service that will meet your needs, and be sure to view samples of previous work before you sign anything. Your guests will appreciate the option of reserving additional copies for themselves, to remember the best holiday party they ever attended!

If you have found yourself on the committee to arrange the company holiday party this year, don't worry! There are other services available which are designed specifically for larger events. Entertainment can be provided by a disk jockey or musicians for either background music or dancing accompaniment, and dance floors are also available for rental. If you're looking for specific activities for your

guests, carnival and Vegas-style games can also be provided by many rental companies.

And how about planning one of the most beautiful and memorable occasions ever - a holiday wedding? Many florist and balloon shops have gotten extremely creative with combining both the wedding and holiday themes to design a most unique event. Be cautious when following a traditional wedding plan schedule; most items will need to be completed ahead of schedule to ensure other holiday activities will not interfere with your plans. Reception halls are booked up well in advance this time of year with company holiday parties, and invitations should be mailed at least one to two weeks earlier than normal so your guests can enter your special day on the calendar before other holiday celebrations are scheduled.

Hosting a holiday party can be exciting. Spend your time on the most enjoyable part - planning. Make arrangements with local businesses to do part or all of the work for you. Even costs involved are reasonable when you consider all of the time you saved.