

Six Secrets to a Successful Party

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Everyone loves a good party. Laughter, friends, good food – it's no wonder that, whenever there's cause for a celebration, people join in with no hesitation. However, sometimes being the host or hostess can be stressful. You want the celebration to be just right. You are worried that there might not be enough to eat. You feel like you're scrambling around like the proverbial headless chicken, instead of relaxing and enjoying the day. But with some good preparation, and a few deep breaths, you'll find yourself jumping right in on the festivities.

1. **Prepare, prepare, prepare.** When planning a menu, find recipes that you can make ahead of time. Even if you can prepare some dishes a few hours before your party, it will help. Try not to do anything too involved at the last minute, or while your guests are present. It's perfectly reasonable if you need to excuse yourself to go pop something into the oven, but try not to do any complicated, time-consuming cooking. If you're having a dinner party, you very well might need to do some cooking with guests present - in which case it's perfectly all right for you to disappear into the kitchen for awhile.
2. **Make sure that all the drinks are out and ready to go.** Designate a table just for drinks, and let it be easy for your guests to help themselves. Provide an ice bucket, glasses, corkscrew, bottle opener, and tongs, as well as the drinks themselves. If you're serving hors d'voves, place a tray or two out for your guests so that they can help themselves when they arrive. Your hors d'oeuvres can be simple – some good simple choices might be an array of cheese and crackers, stuffed olives, hummus with pita toast, or tomatoes with mozzarella and fresh basil.
3. **Have your music picked out and playing beforehand.** Play something fun but soothing. It will help you to relax, and make the set-up work more appealing.
4. **Indulge in some personal time before the party begins.** Take a long shower or bath, take your time getting dressed, and prepare in whatever way you need to. It will only create more stress if you rush around, so leave yourself plenty of time to get ready.
5. **Clean your house the day before.** Yes, it might get somewhat dirty again – particularly if you have children. But it will still be clean enough, and you don't want to have to do any last-minute cleaning. If absolutely necessary, give the floor one last going-over. But don't worry if it's not spotless. Even if *you* notice the dirt, chances are your guests won't.
6. **Have all the details covered.** For example:

- *Where will the coats go?* You can either hang them up in a closet, or drape them across a bed. If you opt for the closet, make sure you have enough empty hangers.
- *Do you have enough chairs?* If you need more, borrow some from friends or family. Folding chairs work well - just make sure they are comfortable enough. If they seem uncomfortable, place pillows on the seats.

If your party is more informal, place a few large pillows on the floor for your guests to sit on. Some people don't mind sitting on the floor. Others might even enjoy it more than a chair.

- *Are there any rooms that are off-limits?* If so, turn out the lights in that room, and close the door. Your guests will get the hint.

Other things to keep in mind...

- Remember that these are your friends and family – not a pack of strangers coming over to judge you. Have fun, and try to enjoy yourself. If the host or hostess is happy and relaxed, chances are the guests will be, too. And in the end, everyone will have a better time.
- Ask a close friend or family member to come over and help you before the party starts, if you feel that you need it. As well as helping with the preparations, a good friend might relax you and help you focus.
- Always double-check to make sure that you have all you need. Having to run out to the store at the last minute doesn't provide you with peace and clarity. If you realize that you've forgotten something, take a good hard look at its importance before you go running off for it. If you can do without it, then by all means - forget about it.
- Don't rush around like a crazy person during your party. Your guests will pick up on your mood, and feel uncomfortable. If you have to rush a little, do so in a light and winsome way. Make a joke about it, or have a bit of conversation as you whiz by. It will make the difference between a sober, stilted party, and a relaxing, jovial one.

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