



## Host with the most: Plan a party that you can also enjoy

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Setting the mood for a perfect holiday party starts before the first guest arrives.

“My advice is to plan ahead and prepare ahead,” said Joanie Williams of The Dinner Party Planning Site ([thedinnerpartyplanningsite.com](http://thedinnerpartyplanningsite.com)). “Planning ahead eliminates stress and allows you to enjoy your own party, too.”

### Guest list

The first step to a successful party is inviting guests who will interact well together, said Jules Hirst, director of First Impressions Etiquette Consulting in Los Angeles ([forajulproductions.com](http://forajulproductions.com)).

“Ideally you want to invite guests who have common interests. This makes it easier when coming up with your seating arrangement for dinner,” Hirst said. “If you are having a less formal, more open gathering like an open house, you can then invite a more diverse group of people.”

Syndi Seid, etiquette expert and founder of [AdvancedEtiquette.com](http://AdvancedEtiquette.com), said, “Always make a list of everyone you want to invite ahead of physically pressing ‘send.’ Then continue to add to this list as additional guests come to mind.

“If you do end up inviting folks who are contrary, make a point to calm them down upon arrival, maybe keep tabs on them as the evening progresses, by saying: ‘John, just to let you know we’ve invited a few friends who are staunch Republicans and I know you are a Democrat, so we’d appreciate keeping any discussion of politics to a minimum. I’m also saying the same to them,’” Seid said.

Setting the mood  
“Music is such a powerful mood-setter; I just can’t imagine any party without it,” Williams said.

Be sure to have the music playing before guests arrive so when they walk through the door, they’re welcomed with music.

“I personally like soft, low-volume music playing in the background” such as “jazzy holiday CDs without distracting vocals,” Seid said. Avoid music that is so loud guests must shout to be heard.

To get guests mingling right when they walk through the door, plan something that will break the ice, Hirst suggests.

“A secret Santa, a white elephant or ornament exchange” will get all of your guests involved and should go with the theme of your party, she said.

For decorations, “you can keep it simple and still get your holiday theme across,” Williams said. Red and green candles, holiday lights, a fire in the fireplace and the smell of cinnamon can set a festive mood.

### Dinner or snacks

The keys to what foods to serve are how long the party will last and what time of day the party is taking place, Seid said.

“A party from 2 to 5 p.m. may not require as much hearty food as one that will take place through normal meal times, such as from 7 to 9 p.m.,” she said. “The more hours and if an open bar is served, the more food is required. Good protein and carbohydrate-type foods and water will help absorb alcohol.”

“Remember that your guests don’t expect restaurant-style food. They are there to enjoy each other’s company,” said Williams. “I recommend make-ahead appetizers such as a shrimp tray and a low-calorie option like veggies and dip. Remember, your guests may be dressed up, so it should be easy to eat.”

“When it comes to food, the mood and your budget are important factors. If you want to throw a five-course dinner party, and you can afford it, then knock yourself out,” said relationship expert April Masini ([AskApril.com](http://AskApril.com)). “If you want to throw it and can’t afford it, consider delegating courses to your guests, knowing that this changes the tone of the party and makes it more casual. If you can afford to cater, then you’re free to enjoy hosting, and if you’re a control freak and a great chef, you might want to have your party center around the kitchen where the cooking is part of the entertainment.”

When thinking about drinks, “make sure that you have enough non-alcoholic beverages in addition to spirits,” said Masini. “For instance, it’s nice to have hot coffee, sparkling water, sodas and juices in addition to alcoholic beverages.”

If you plan ahead, you’ll be able to enjoy your party, too, said Hirst.

“Keep in mind you should be ready to go at least 30 minutes before your event begins with music playing,” Hirst said. “This way when your guests arrive you are there at the door ready to greet everyone as they arrive, you are relaxed and set a calm tone versus if you were running around and still putting out chairs, setting up the food table as your guests are arriving. Your stress will rub off on your guests and may create tension.”

### Playlist

Your ideal playlist depends on your personal preferences. Some people like to hear the classics, while others would rather listen to updated versions by current musicians.

Holiday playlists can also be interspersed with songs you and your friends enjoy listening to now.

Here are a few ideas:

“Wrapped in red”: Kelly Clarkson released her first holiday album in 2013. Check out the title track, “Wrapped in Red.”

“When You Wish Upon a Star”: Also new for 2013, Mary J. Blige serves up a tree-topping duet with Barbra Streisand.

“Wonderful Christmastime”: Paul McCartney plays all the instruments on this 1979 release that’s simply wonderful.

“Frosty the Snowman”: The Jackson 5 covered Gene Autry’s classic with a stomping Motown version in 1970.

“Santa Claus is Coming to Town”: Bruce Springsteen rocks out in this Christmas classic that was released as a B side in 1985.

“Santa Baby”: Sultry actress Eartha Kitt purred her expensive requests to Santa – like a sable under the tree – in 1953.

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