



There's no better way to start the summer than with a Memorial Day barbecue celebrated with friends and family. If you're the one doing the hosting, though, it can result in a few headaches and some hefty grocery bills before it's all said and done. How can you throw an enjoyable and delicious Memorial Day get-together without breaking the bank? We spoke with a couple of experts in entertaining to get their tips.

Go easy on the meat

[Ask April](#)'s April Masini recommends embracing veggies instead of meat. "Meat is more expensive than vegetables, pasta and dairy, so eliminate or limit the meat, and amp up the grilled veggies, summer quiches and green salads tossed with cheese of your choice! Crusty bread and fresh fruit will make everyone forget the meat loss."

Get an accurate headcount ahead of time

Debby Hohler, representative for [Upromise](#), stresses the importance of an accurate guest count. "Taking the time to get a truly accurate headcount will help to eliminate frustration and food waste. Make this picnic perfectly old-school and send out real invitations with an RSVP date. If you haven't heard from a few invitees, call them up!"

Throw a potluck

"You have to be careful about delegating food assignments, but as a potluck host, you can serve the beverages and have others bring the food," Masini explains. "It's inclusive, interesting and an ice-breaker to talk about who brought what when you've got folks who don't know each other. Or, you can skew the potluck assignments and tell people to bring their own food to be grilled — fish, burgers, steaks, wieners or chicken — and then you provide the salad, chips and drinks yourself."

Hohler suggests taking it up a notch by hosting a potluck as a friendly *Top Chef*-inspired competition.

Look into affordable catering options

"Downscale catering can keep you flush, while having fun," Masini explains. "Sandwich places like Subway will deliver a three-, four-, five- and six-foot sandwich, made to your specifications, that's super impressive

and inexpensive. It's not a barbecue, but it's a fun change. Some supermarkets, especially upscale ones, will prepare tin foil containers of fried chicken, as well as tossed salads, potato salad, coleslaw, etc. Just make sure to order in advance."

Skip the soda

Hohler suggests skipping individualized beverages. "Cans of soda and bottles of water can tack on unnecessary costs to your party. Make big pitchers of flavored lemonades or fresh brewed iced tea and serve them in pretty beverage dispensers. Your guests will be wowed with your hosting artistry and you'll save money over time!"

Organize a progressive/graduated neighborhood dinner

April Masini suggests getting to know your neighbors through a progressive dinner. "Consider a graduated barbecue dinner, where you go from one home to the next for cocktails, appetizers, entrees, desserts, etc. The idea is that you travel en masse from one house to the next and each home provides one part of the meal. It's fun — you get to know your neighbors and you're only responsible for one part of the meal, not the whole thing."

Shop online for deals

Hohler suggests going the online route find great deals. "After taking some inventory and figuring out what you'll need for the party, do some shopping online. Online shopping is easy, and rewards programs like Upromise are always a great idea — you can get 5 percent cash back for college just for shopping at the stores you're already visiting, like [Cooking.com](#) or [Omaha Steaks](#)."

Last updated by [Briana Fabbri](#) at May 14, 2014.

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