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## Throw Your Perfect Party Without Making Guests Do All the Work

By [Kathryn Tuggle](#)

NEW YORK ([MainStreet](#)) — How many times have you gotten a last minute call or text from a friend hosting a party: "Can you bring ice?" "Don't forget the booze!" or "I think we may need something for dessert." Those of us who enjoy having people over understand the pressure of being a good host, and if you've ever attended a house party, you know it's considered good manners to walk through the door holding a bottle of wine in one hand and a box of cookies in the other.

Unfortunately, party planning isn't always easy, and if hosting gets the best of you, it might be tempting to reach out to guests and ask them to supply what you need. But there's a fine line between a simple request for extra drinks and a demand for bottles of champagne your guests simply can't afford. Before you plan your next party, make sure you're not asking your guests for more than they feel comfortable with. Experts warn that greedy hosts may find themselves permanently removed from others' guest lists.

Is it rude to ask guests to bring food and drink to a party?

It depends on the type of party, says Heather Bell-Pellegrino, [president of A Perfect Plan!](#), a Westchester, N.Y., event planning firm.

"If it's a backyard barbecue/get together, it is not rude to ask guests to bring a dish. Tell your guests you're so excited to be hosting the get together, and are going to supply the main meal but would appreciate everyone bringing a bottle of soda and a bag of chips," Bell-Pellegrino says.

You can also tell guests that you're going to provide wine and beer, for example, and if they would prefer another form of beverage, they can feel to bring their own, she suggests.

With that said, if you're throwing a birthday party or any type of party where gifts may be exchanged, it's not acceptable to ask for food or drink.

If there are presents being exchanged "I would certainly say to keep the party within your budget so you can genuinely host your guests; they should not be asked to bring something in addition to a gift. I'd say the rule of thumb would mainly be if your guests are bringing a gift, it is not appropriate to ask them to contribute further."

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Although it may go without saying, April Masini, founder of Ask April and author of **Date Out of Your League**, says that it's a big no-no to ask for drinks or nibbles at a wedding or shower.

"Do not ask guests to bring pot luck or BYOB to a wedding reception or any type of bridal shower. The same goes for baby showers. Doing so exhibits a lack of grace," Masini says. Not all family functions are off limits, though.

"It's normal to ask family and friends who are regulars at your Thanksgiving table to bring a dish," Masini says. "The Thanksgiving meal is a huge undertaking, and it helps to dole out an assignment to guests, whether it's a pie or the sweet potatoes -- or to guests who don't cook, a bottle of wine."

If you do ask guests for help with a few party items, you should never look to "[profit](#)" off of potluck or BYOB, Masini says.

"If you hoard your guest's BYOB and potluck offerings, you'll look cheap and stingy."

Try to open and serve everything you're given, but if you can't, there's a graceful way to get rid of leftovers: You can always send guests home with leftovers bags and plates wrapped in tin foil.

"If you know who brought what, send your guests home with their offerings that were unopened," she explains. "Be generous. Pull out a bag of plastic baggies so they can take home some leftover cookies and brownies for the drive."

No matter the type of party you're hosting, Mary Kelly, founder of the **Productive Leaders** [business](#) development consultancy in Denver, Colo., says there are some people who should never be asked to contribute: people you don't know very well and people you work with.

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"Requesting food and drink is not the right way to get closer to people or to impress people," Kelly says.

In the event you are providing the venue for a work function and everyone is expected to bring a dish, Kelly advises turning the food coordination over to another co-worker so you don't appear too demanding.

"It doesn't need to appear as though the party is your party," Kelly says. By entrusting another co-worker with the food and drink "you're making it clear that this is a work function and everyone is expected to participate and contribute."

Once you've decided the type of party you're having and narrowed down the guest list to something you can afford, says Ricky Eisen, founder and president of New York City-based catering company **Between the Bread**, you've got to inform your guests what they're in for.

"No matter what, your guests must be informed of your event plan ahead of time," she says, and if they find out you're asking for items they don't feel comfortable bringing, "they need to have the opportunity to decline your invitation. Also, There is nothing more embarrassing than going to a party empty-handed when you are expected to bring something."

If your guests are offended by your request to contribute to the party, you can suggest that they bring whatever they can, and you as the host will have to be prepared to compensate for that, she says, adding, "Never host a party where there is not enough food or beverage provided for normal consumption."

"The key here is to know your guests, and know what is reasonable to ask of them," Eisen says. "Each guest should only be asked to bring one item at most, and as the host you should be well prepared to provide the balance of the items that are needed to complete a meal or event."

Because party budgets, theme and kind of food served varies, Eisen says there is no rule of thumb when it comes to the value of the items that can be requested. The host should leave it to the guest to bring an item of their choosing, though.

"It is OK to ask for a category as in, 'bring dessert,' 'bring wine,' 'bring cheese,' etc., but not request a specific item," she says.

For hosts really concerned about party budget, Eisen says it's important not to overextend yourself. Making your own dishes and drinks rather than hiring a caterer is a great way to save, as is having a limited menu.

"Dial down the budget. Your friends want to see you -- they don't want to see you bankrupt," Masini says.

— *By Kathryn Tuggle*

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