

November 2008 Organized Event Planning!

Tis the season to host Events in your home! The Holidays are coming, in all shapes and sizes, and it is always best to be prepared. Events are supposed to be enjoyable collections of friends and family, but some times we get overwhelmed with the details.

So, here are some suggestions to make any event you are hosting run more smoothly, with less effort and stress from you, and more enjoyment for everyone!

Answer this Question, honestly: Why are you hosting this event?

Typically, the answer includes: “To honor a specific person or Holiday, to show hospitality to loved ones, to share good times and good food, to get together with friends’. Rarely, is the answer “so I can not sleep for days prior, cleaning like a mad person and stressing small details”.

We need to remember “Why”, and that most events, even if they are at our home, are not just about us. Once we shift the focus to the “Why” we are having a party, we can focus on the important stuff like our loved ones and common hospitality.

Take Help When It Is Offered:

When someone offers to bring a dish to pass or a bottle of wine to an event that you are hosting, the correct response is “Thank you for being so thoughtful, that would be lovely” or something along those lines. For many years, I said ”No, no, I have everything covered”, and , and then would be up at 5 am baking. Learn from my experience. Say Yes.

Embrace White Table Linens or Paper Goods:

White goes wonderfully with any accent color, or no color at all. A beautiful table, with glowing candles, shiny stemware, and splashes of color is lovely no matter the event. So, you need only buy white items, to re-use for all entertaining, and splashes of season appropriate color to make things shine. Less to store, less to take care of, less time-wasting decision making.

Employ Assistance

If your means allow, call in the troops to assist you for the big events. Call a cleaning service, cater a few items, hire a high school student to serve appetizers and check your buffet. For our big Tree Trimming party, we hire a few teenager to play with the kids in the basement family room, so the adults can actually carry on a conversation. The kids feel like they get their own party, and we feel like we get to visit with our guests.

Food Place Cards and Serving Dishes The Day Before

This may be my favorite new tip to make your event run more smoothly.

Put menu item names on index cards, paper place cards, or the re-usable ceramic place card I just ordered from Solutions.com.

Put card in dish and place dish on table or buffet where you want it served. This ensures you have dishes and space for everything.

When someone asks how they can help, they can easily help you serve by just following the cards, and your stuff will look the way you intend!

Leave cards in place while filling dishes, and helpers put them back when ready.

This is also great if you have guests with dietary issues, such as alerting which dishes are vegetarian, dairy or peanut free, low sodium or whatever.

Do as much ahead of time as possible.

There are lots of things that can be made completely a day or 2 ahead of time, and still served fresh for your event. Desserts, Jello molds, simple vegetables, casseroles. Assemble these items a few days early, and save yourself time the day of your event.

Every year, I make this suggestion, and mention my make-ahead mashed potatoes that can be completely made, put back in a casserole dish and refrigerated up to a week. Then you pop them in the oven an hour before dinner with all your other food, and they are ready to serve.

Using chafing dishes or warming plates gets you out of the kitchen and able to attend your own party!

This may sound crazy, but we plan a lot of our Holiday Events hosted here at home close together.

Business group brunch, book club party, Tree decorating party, Cookie baking extravaganza.

The house is already clean, the serving dishes are all out already, and we use one trip to the restaurant supply store or paper goods store for all the events. And it is so much fun!

Final Thoughts:

Cookies can be bought (I won't tell, the secret is safe with me).

Gourmet is not necessary.

The day of the event is not the time to try a new recipe.

Pre Party planning:

7 weeks before: Pick Your Date, assemble Guest List

6 weeks before: Invitation, Procure services, like babysitter, server or bartender, cleaning services, carpet cleaning, etc.

2 weeks before: RSVP and follow up, Catering / menu plans, Place your Orders, Confirm what others are bringing, if applicable, Place Orders or line up from friends or family for tables / chairs and equipment, if applicable

One Week before:, Find and clean Appropriate serving dishes, Clean out refrigerator and freezer, and wipe it all clean, making room for serving dishes, etc., Start making ice, if you choose, Heavy cleaning, deliver all stuff to other people! Recycling items out, donations dropped off.

Four days before: Shop—Grocery, Shop or Clean—Linens and / or paper supplies, Begin food prep Shop for Liquor / Beverages

One day before: Last minute grocery run – fresh meat and produce, Pre party food prep, Plan serving space, leave note cards in place for dishes, Extra seating and tables? Clean house!

Day of: Trash cans / vacuum / bathrooms, Catering / Ice pick-up or delivery, Final food prep and table and room arrangement, Have Fun!