



Planning a Housewarming Party

Set the Tone

Before you do anything, you'll need to decide what type of party you want. Will you invite couples with children, or make it an adults-only cocktail party? Will it be an outdoor event or sit-down dinner? Dressy or casual?

Your new home's strengths can factor into this decision. If you have a beautiful pool and patio area, you may want to have a poolside barbecue. Or host a British pub night in your paneled basement rec room with built-in bar. What type of party will showcase your home most effectively? Once you decide, you can start planning the fun.

Send Out Invitations

Decide how many people you can comfortably accommodate, and then draw up your invitation list. It's a good idea to mail invitations at least two or three weeks before the event so guests have time to plan. There are a variety of invitation options available, depending on your budget and how your social circle typically handles these matters. Here are a few ideas:

Email: This is the most cost-effective method, assuming everyone on your list has a computer. You can include photo attachments of the new house, and dress up the text with background wallpaper, shading and unique fonts. An added plus for guests—they can respond via email.

Store-bought invites: If you're short on time these can be the quickest alternative, because most have preprinted text and all you need to do is fill in the blanks.

Make-your-own: With your computer and a little creativity, you can come up with a fun and original invitation, one that includes a photo or party theme-related graphics. Or if you're including children in the mix, work with your kids to create a handmade invite.

Plan the Menu

Unless you're having a sit-down dinner, it's generally a good idea to serve foods that can be eaten easily, such as hearty appetizers and finger foods, as guests will likely be standing up or balancing a plate on their knees. It's also nice to be able to coordinate food with your party theme and décor, e.g., fajitas and margaritas for a Southwestern barbecue.

You'll also need to consider guests with allergies. You don't want to serve Thai chicken satays with peanut sauce if there's a child who's severely allergic. Before you finalize the menu, try to determine if any of your guests has specific dietary restrictions.

Decorate

If you're ready to host a party, chances are you've given the house a thorough cleaning, comfortably settled in and gotten organized. Now the fun can begin. How you decorate will depend of course on what type of party you're having. Following are a few common themes, with decorating tips for each.

Barbecue: If you have a deck or patio, string small outdoor lights, mini-Chinese lanterns or whimsically shaped novelty lights around the deck rail or outdoor umbrella. For a mellow glow, you can also place decorative torch lights or garden stakes with attached votives along a walkway or sitting area.

Indoor cocktail party, buffet or sit-down dinner: Fresh flowers are always appropriate; they instantly add color and life to a room. Balloons can add a surprisingly elegant touch...either position "bouquets" around the room, or

release helium balloons tied with ribbons to create a colorful “sky” overhead. Depending on how dressy your event is, you can use your fine china and linens or go casual and use festive paper party ware for easy cleanup.

Family gathering: If you’re inviting kids, choose a colorful decorating scheme with lots of visual interest, such as a circus theme. This can include creating a small circus tent by draping striped fabric over a few well-anchored poles, stakes or strategically placed furniture. If it’s getting near the holidays, you can plan your décor around a Halloween, Thanksgiving or winter theme. Or let the kids do the decorating: tape large sheets of blank paper to the walls and let them color or draw. It’ll keep them busy and create a vivid backdrop for the festivities.

Set the Mood

Music and lighting are the two most effective ways to set a party mood. Of course, the type of mood you want will depend on your party theme. If you’re planning an elegant cocktail gathering, you may light candles and play mellow jazz to establish an air of sophistication. Steel drum music and lighted torches might enhance a poolside beach party, while spooky black lights and haunted house sound effects will create a “scary” Halloween setting.

Once all the preplanning is done, there’s only one thing left to do – enjoy your party, your guests and most importantly, your new home.