

10 Party Planning Tips

1. Start Early

It's wise to start planning at least 2 months in advance, if possible. A party's success & quality will be most ideally achieved if thought through completely. And this takes time.

2. Choose a Theme

A party is pulled off if it flows throughout. A theme could be related to a specific food item, character, book, patterns, or even based on 1 or 2 consistently used colors.

3. Gather Inspiration

Research your chosen theme via the web & magazines. Print and/or bookmark ideas (decor, menu, invitations, favors, etc) you like. I set up a folder on my computer to save ideas as I come across them. Creating original ideas are some of the very best ones! Don't discount any idea that you create yourself.

4. Choose a Menu

Choose food that compliments your theme, doesn't require too much prep, but shows creativity & class. I like to choose a menu based around whether or not it can be made/stored in advance. Cupcakes can be made up to a month prior to the party if frozen. Many dips, breads can also be made/frozen in advance. Yes, even the birthday cake! Fresh dishes should be fairly simple to execute & able to stand at room temp (i.e. salads, cheese/fruit/veggies, kabobs, drinks etc) to allow enough time to prepare all other necessary party needs. If you're using storebought items - always remove labels and/or packaging and display in other containers.

5. Guests + Invitations

Set your guest list. I always make two lists. One list is VIPs... the other list are my Optionals. This helps narrow down the final count when budgeting. Invitations should coordinate the theme & mailed out 3 weeks in advance.

6. Set a Budget

Once you have your research completed - you'll be able to price point how much each of your inspirations/menu items will cost (per person). If your ideas are overly expensive based on budget, you'll now be able to axe some, to keep others. This will help determine your exact guest count as well. If your party is looking to be under budget, you can afford to go to add more guests from your "optional" list. I found that getting an accurate idea of how much ea. idea/guest costs can keep the party to the exact price point that's comfortable.

7. Entertainment

Decide if games/interactive activities are appropriate for your party or not. Again, all entertainment should relate/compliment the theme in some way. Some parties are more ideal for mingling without interactive entertaining. However, others would be "kicked up to the next level" if entertainment were included. The decision of whether or not to add entertaining elements on your party's theme should be based on the theme and/or audience.

8. Buying the Goods + Execution

Now it's time to stock up & buy the goods! Buy all of your materials (excluding menu) at least 2 weeks in advance to allow for shipping delays/etc. Remember, invitations should be purchased a month prior allowing for the 3 weeks mail time. Fresh menu items should be bought the week leading up to the party. Reserve a special place in your home/venue to store your party goods until time of execution. Set up your party decor and serving ware at least a day in advance. Setting up in advance will help you visualize the party. That will help you determine if there's something missing (i.e. flowers/balloons/banners/jars etc. needed to fill a space). There's always last minutes things that come up! Busting your bum to get the linens on the table as your guests arrive, shouldn't be one of them.

9. Enjoy

All of your advance planning efforts are leaving you left to actually enjoy the party and your guests! A poorly planned party is obvious based on the host/hostess' ability to enjoy the party. Haven't you been to the party where the host/hostess are stressed out? Yes, rummaging in the kitchen, opening storebought items and dumping them in bowls, while guests are asked to "come on in! Enjoy yourself! We'll be right there!" AWKWARD! After all, you're the one who put in all the grunt work. You deserve to enjoy the party YOU planned!

10. Make an Impression

Don't pull out ALL your tricks during the party. Leave a few teasers for when the party is about to wrap up. Ending a party is a bummer! But it doesn't have to be... I always like to send my guests home with something unexpected. The party favors can be the key to making a lasting impression. Even sending the guests home with part of the decor can do the trick (i.e. for my Valentine's Day party, I glittered fresh red roses displayed in vintage soda bottles as part of the decor. At the end of the party in addition to the party favors, each lady took home glittered roses). And don't forget to write thank you notes for any gifts received from guests. Thank you notes should be received no later than a week from the party date.