6 Steps To A Stress Free Dinner Party



1. Consider Doing a Theme

Themed dinner parties are great fun because they can expose you to foods you and your guests wouldn’t normally eat. Mexican, Italian, Thanksgiving in July, or a movie-themed party are fun ways to get creative with it. Hosting a themed party can make planning a menu easier because the menu almost plans itself. Get into it with decorations, costumes, and music revolving around your theme.

2. Plan the Menu

Deciding what to create (and how to do it), is the greatest challenge of any dinner party. Obviously, you want to show off your best dish, but cooking a time-consuming chicken galantine won't do anyone any favors. Main dishes that are hearty enough to be made ahead of time are ideal, so you can spend more time entertaining your guests, and less on last-minute prep. For this, Slow Cooker and Pressure Cooker recipes like Root Beer Pulled Pork Sandwiches or Lasagna are perfect. Despite being effortless, they taste like you slaved over a hot stove all day.

Just because side dishes are called "sides", doesn't mean they can't have the wow factor that your entrée does. When choosing sides, go for something with complementary but different flavors than your main. Cornbread compliments a pulled pork sandwich because it brings sweetness to the salty and savory flavors of the pork, while roasted green beans will bring a crunch to round out the textures. Two to three side dishes are typically enough to complete the meal without overcrowding your table and palate.

Don't neglect the h'ordeuvres, but there's no need to go overboard. Unless you're throwing a wine and cheese party, one or two light appetizers will do to avoid premature food comas. If you're worried about saving time, it's okay to go with

store-bought (whether you admit that to your guests or not is up to you). Cheese platters, ham roll-ups or a buffalo chicken dip are all easy ways to keep your guests satisfied while waiting for the main show to begin. Plan to have your sides done and ready in the Roaster when your guests arrive so all you have to do is plate and serve.

3. …Then Your Guest List

Your guests are the heart of your dinner party. Similar to your menu options, less can be more. When planning your numbers, keep in mind how much space you have in your house as well as, realistically, how many people your recipe will feed. It's better to have leftovers for the next few days or to send with guests than it is to run out of food. Sending invites for a dinner party is typically done about two weeks ahead of the date to give a proper response and planning time. If you're doing a theme, this will also give your invitees a chance to get their attire ready.

Also, consider personalities and relationships when selecting your invite list. Inviting four of your closest, but shy friends who don't know each other may lead to awkward conversation gaps. That's not to say everyone has to know everyone, but everyone should know at least one other person

(besides you) well enough to make conversation. We're not a fan of assigning seats at the table, because if there's a great conversation flow during appetizers, there is no need to break it up.

4. Beverages Need Love Too

Drinks are the final piece of the menu but are also the easiest to pull together. For most groups, a full bar with top-shelf liquor isn't necessary. Simply making a signature cocktail or two that fit with the menu, a wine option, and one non-alcoholic choice should be enough to please most. Pitchers of water on the bar during appetizers, and on the table for dinner are also an accommodation that can be overlooked easily.

5. Enlist Help

A second set of hands on deck may be the single most important thing you can do for your sanity when planning a dinner party. Recruiting a roommate, spouse, or friend to be your "right-hand man" for last-minute grocery store runs (there will always be at least one), helping plate and serve food, and greet guests will go a long way in feeling more put together. Even if you never need them, it will be comforting knowing you

have a backup.

6. Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff

Things will happen. Your best friend will show up with a new gluten-free, vegan diet, your decorative candle will get knocked over and scorch your table linens, or your cousin will bring a guest without any prior warning. For better or for worse, these are all a natural part of the entertaining process. If you laugh it off and move on, we promise your guests will too and be more focused on your overall awesomeness than any flubs. The one thing you won’t have to worry about is your food turning out great—we’ve got that part of it covered.